

at the feet of the celebrated Vardan Batišetsi *vardapet* at Amrdol in Bałēš (Bitlis). Kolot left his imprint on the history of Armenian letters at this juncture, and his cultural activities ushered in an era of educational and intellectual renewal. In practical terms he sponsored numerous publications, the translation of many books (mainly from Latin), and personally collected and commissioned the copying of manuscripts. He also set up a school and a library at the Armenian church at Kumkapu and saw to it that worthy disciples carried on the torch. Indeed, his administrative abilities and cultural initiatives consolidated Constantinople as the major Armenian center in the Ottoman Empire.

Far more organized and far greater in impact in the cultural realm were the efforts of **MĤIT'AR SEBASTATSI**, a contemporary of Kolot. Mĥitar founded a Catholic order (Mĥit'arean Miabanutiwn) in Constantinople, which later (1717) moved to the islet of St. Lazarus in Venice and has since, with its split-branch in Vienna (1811), made invaluable contributions to Armenian culture. Mĥitar's vision was to bring about a religious and cultural revival among the Armenians, which he and his followers set out to accomplish through periodicals, printing, translations, a network of schools, and painstaking research into Armenian language, literature, and history. At the same time they channeled Western thought and progress into Armenia. So thorough was their influence that it went beyond Mĥitar's original scope and control and constituted one of the main factors that stimulated change and progress in Armenian realities in the eighteenth and, particularly, the nineteenth centuries.

Mĥitar's enterprise and abilities are too great to be judged by what he committed to writing. Teaching and attending to his congregation left him with little time for creative compositions. Yet he managed to write twenty or so books. The overwhelming majority is of religious-moral nature (hymns, prayers, commentaries, etc.), and a high value is still attached to his commentary on the Gospel of Matthew. He has grammars of Classical and Modern Armenian, the latter being the first attempt to describe (in Turkish) the structure of Modern Armenian in its rudimentary stages. Mĥitar took the lead in the field of Armenian lexicography as well; his dictionary of the Armenian language, *Baṙgirk' haykazean lezui* (surpassed by another monumental Mekhitarist accomplishment, the *NBHL*, i.e. *Nor baṙgirk' haykazean lezui*, Venice, 1836–37), is the first scientifically compiled Armenian dictionary.

Mĥitar's movement helped bring the thorny and ultimately divisive issue of national identity into sharper focus. The distinction he made between his national and religious allegiances was irrelevant and unacceptable to most Armenians, for whom national and religious issues



formed an inseparable fusion, symbolized by their non-evangelistic national church. Any threat to her unity was a threat to the unity of the Armenian people, especially since a subject's identity or status in the Ottoman Empire was determined by his religious affiliation rather than ethnic-national background. Dispersion and the lack of a political focus had further reinforced the Church's position as the only national institution, as yet irreplaceable. Not surprisingly, therefore, friction and outright hostility between the Armenian Church on the one hand, and the Catholic missionaries and the French embassy on the other, continued unabated throughout the century, giving rise to a number of polemical works.

Armenian cultural relations were not confined to the West alone. A telling indication of interaction between Armenian and Islamic cultures was the birth of a new genre, that of the *ašutakan* poetry (minstrelsy). The word *ašut* derived from the Arabic *‘āshiq* (lover), and despite the limitation implied by the word, it denoted an itinerant poet-musician who sang in public on a very broad range of themes. The genre, common in Middle Eastern (including Transcaucasian) literatures, initially arose under Islamic-Persian impact, with the first *ašuts* emanating from Nor Juḷay. The extent of such Islamic influences and the elements of Armenian popular poetry that shaped the tradition have been studied neither adequately nor dispassionately. It was by no means uncommon for Armenian *ašuts* to write in non-Armenian languages, especially Turkish. Sayeat-Nōvay (q.v.), in whose work the art attained its finest expression, wrote in Armenian, Georgian, and in what in more recent times has been called Azeri-Turkish. The *ašuts* employed local dialects, teeming with Persian, Turkish, and Arabic loan words. But Jiwani (q.v.), who is recognized as the founder of the "national school" of minstrelsy, used the written standard. In the second half of the twentieth century, the appellation *ašut* was discarded; the old Armenian *gusan*, by which Armenian minstrels were known in olden times (and which despite some fanciful etymologies is almost certainly an Iranian loan) was revived.

In matters intellectual and literary, certain trends emerge more clearly in the eighteenth century. The Mekhitarists channel Western thought methodically and in various forms, such as by way of encyclopedic compilations and books for practical purposes, the use of Western sources and methodology, and translations, literary and otherwise, never neglecting the fundamentally religious and educational essence of their mission. Unlike the western Armenian communities, political aspirations dominate the thoughts and activities of a number of prominent Armenians and ecclesiastic leaders in Transcaucasia and Russia, as well as India. The *ašutakan* genre reigns supreme. In western Anatolia, Armenian poets pay



a greater attention to form within the confines of traditional verse. They are still unaffected by European trends, but in general take a much closer look at Europe. The publication in Armeno-Turkish of some books of essential national significance (religious and historical) and the writing of verse in Turkish clearly indicate the gradual rise of a Turkish-speaking stratum in Armenian communities well to the west of Erzurum. As the Armenian Patriarchate in the Ottoman capital consolidated its power, it acquired the semblance of a central national authority for the western Armenians. A reformist catholicos will a little later in the century add luster to Ējmiatzin. The latter's spiritual supremacy would not be challenged, but rivalry between the two seats would continue unabated. Perhaps most important of all, M. Chamchean's lavishly embellished history of Armenia would completely recover an idealized past. It would have a tremendous impact generating romantic visions and expectations. Such sentiments would, especially in the first half of the nineteenth century, be heightened by the publication of the works of early Armenian historians.

### A Survey of the Literature of the Age

Nothing is known of **SARGIS APUCHEḤTSI**'s (17th–18th c.) life save that he was from the village of Apucheḥ near Akn (Eğin, now Kemaliye, Turkey). He is believed to have flourished in the first half of the eighteenth century. His poems sing of nature and love and elaborate on some religious themes (the Virgin, Jesus Christ, and John the Baptist). Like all his other verse, his compositions treating the latter theme are subdued in tone, sparing of words, but sincere in belief and expression. Similarly gentle is his voice in his descriptive songs dedicated to the awakening of nature in spring with the splendor of its colors and flora. But nature is a distant world and no threads seem to link him to it. Much closer to the real world are his words of affection for a woman who seems to have caused him a great deal of tribulation and doubt. Unlike Yovnat'an Naḥaš (q.v.), he sings not of the joys of love, which must have remained a dream, but of its indispensability for mutual happiness, as illustrated in his poem fashioned in the traditional pattern of the rose and the nightingale.

Yovhannēs Karnetsi (q.v.) knew **GRIGOR ŌŠAKANTSI** (c1756–98) personally and sketched his biography (still in manuscript form) with some help from the elderly members of the Ējmiatzin congregation. From an early age, Grigor was sent to Ējmiatzin, where Catholicos Simēon Erewantsi (q.v.) ordained him a celibate priest, and Catholicos Łukas Karnetsi (1722–99) a bishop. He was sent as nuncio ("nuirak"



The interpretation of Łapantsi's allegorical poems is not yet satisfactorily resolved. Š. Nazaryan, author of the monograph on Łapantsi, has tried to refute earlier views that Łapantsi sang of love. In her view, the poems are all of a patriotic nature. There is certainly much to be said for her theory, and she is probably right; but more evidence will be needed for such conclusions to become convincing. These are some of Łapantsi's most passionate poems; and if the titles of some of them clearly establish them as a praise for the *Patria*, the allegorical nature of many others, especially where the allegory of the rose and nightingale is employed, render it difficult to determine whether Łapantsi's sentiments are for a person or the personified fatherland.

A considerable number of Łapantsi's poems are on occasional topics. He writes in a simple but eloquent Classical Armenian, which is not entirely free from elements of Modern Armenian. There are certain instances, notably in his longest poem dedicated to Constantinople, in which Łapantsi violates his own normative prescription to maintain a sense of proportion. But he has a distinct ability to make most effective use of rhyme, rhythm, and meter, which allied with his spirited sentiments, place his work among the best of the age.

**YOVNATAN NAŁAŠ** (1661–1722), founder of the celebrated Yovnatanean family of artists, distinguished himself as both a poet and painter. His jovial poems light up the concluding decades of the seventeenth century and usher in the eighteenth century. There are many elements of the *ašutakan* genre in his lyric pieces, some of which he himself set to music. One can also glean certain aspects of the lyric tradition shaped by masters such as Kostandin Erznkatsi, Yovhannēs Tulkurantsi, and Grigoris Ałtamartsi, but no trace whatsoever of the duality that tormented them. His sensual poetry shows greater affinities with the *hayrēns* attributed to Nahapet K'uchak, embraces the secular spirit with glee, and paves the way for the distinct and distinguished art of Sayeał-Nōvay (q.v.).

Yovnatān composed love, moral-religious, satirical, elegiac, and mirthful poetry. In both his moral and satirical works, clergymen are one of his targets for their laziness, avarice, ignorance, and hypocrisy. He teased banteringly fishwifely, headstrong, superstitious, slovenly women, and the impious; but expressed disgust for egocentric men. Definitely a man of urban tastes, he had a low opinion of the then squalid Erevan. The artist stood tall in him, as he dismissed the importance attached to money and derided those who subordinated to Mammon, the creations of artists and artisans. In poems published by S. Simonean (1914–86, q.v.),



Yovnat'an has a description of the water blessing on Epiphany; of Armenian churches in Šorot and Agulis, and praise for the benefactors of the former; and elegies on the death of two clergymen and a certain *mahtesi* (i.e., from the Arabic *maqdisī*, one that had made the pilgrimage to Jerusalem), Šahbaz Ērzumetsi.

Apart from satire, eulogy, and elegy, Yovnat'an's fame lies principally in his poems of love and merrymaking, the vivid and convivial expressions of a frolicsome soul. Many a mixed metaphor, some haste, repetition, and at times a slipshod style, tell us of a sprightly man carried away by the visible and attainable, colors and nature, women and wine, kindness and fraternity, all of which gave this transient life its meaning. Mortifying the flesh was an alien concept to him; he praised the Lord, called for compassion, but relished the delights of the temporal. Yovnat'an and his descendants, who made noteworthy contributions to Armenian art and literature, were receptive to Persian and other Middle Eastern influences. His son, Yakob (d. 1757), a painter and minstrel who wrote in Armenian, Georgian, and Turkish, mourned his father's death in an elegy that remains the principal biographical source for Yovnat'an.

In a little over half a century after his murder during the Persian invasion of Tiflis in 1795, SAYEAT' NŌVAY's (1722?-95) poetry was partly recovered in an 1852 Moscow edition of his poems by Gēorg Aḥverdean (1818-61). Research into Sayeat' Nōvay's life and work has since been conducted continuously, bringing him an ever-growing popularity. Especially in the last decades of the Soviet regime, his poetry was promoted as a symbol of fraternity for the Transcaucasian republics of Armenia, Georgia, and Azerbaijan.

There are a number of uncertainties about Sayeat' Nōvay's life and work. His birth date is unknown, though 1722 seems to be gaining ground. There is some doubt concerning his birthplace too, but most biographers consider him a native of Tiflis. His mother's family were *qmani* (Georgian for serfs), and his immigrant father, having married into that family, must have become a *qma* too. It follows that Sayeat' Nōvay himself was a *samkvidro qma* ("hereditary" serf). He seems to have served his apprenticeship with a weaver. His formal education, if any, did not go beyond the elementary, and his knowledge he owed to self-instruction. Apart from Armenian, Georgian, and Turkish, he probably knew some Persian and may have had a rudimentary knowledge of Arabic. Even though he copied Grigor Narekatsi's *Lamentation*, he had only a smattering of Classical Armenian. It is presumed that his teacher in the *ašutakan* art was Dosti, an *ašut* from Tiflis. It is also presumed that he



was captured in his early teens during a raid and was sold into slavery in the Ottoman Empire, that in 1741 the future king Erekli II (Irakli) of Georgia ransomed him, and that during his years of slavery he likely saw many countries, including India. The story of Sayeat Nōvay's travels was probably a *topos* common to minstrels and so were a number of related issues, all of which need more evidence to be taken seriously.

Most critics agree that Sayeat Nōvay became a resident musician at the Georgian court. Here he fell in love with Anna Batonishvili, a daughter of Taimuraz, king of Kartli (1744–62), and a sister of Erekli II, then king of Kakheti. This affair between an ordinary mortal and a noble woman led to Sayeat Nōvay's fall from favor and his eviction from court some time in the early 1750s. He was readmitted a few years later but was thrown out of the royal court for good c1759. Not only that, he was sent into exile and the priesthood. Although central to understanding one of the dominant themes of Sayeat Nōvay's poetry, unrequited love, this story needs further evidence. He married a certain Marmar who bore him two sons and two daughters. Upon his wife's death (1768) he became a celibate priest, a member of the brotherhood of the Halpat monastery.

For the historians of Armenian literature, the Middle Ages conclude with the eighteenth century. Sayeat Nōvay is seen as the last poet of the age and as the greatest Armenian *ašut*. In many ways, the Soviets had good reason to promote him as a symbol of fraternity: he wrote in all three major languages of Transcaucasia, Armenian, Georgian, and Azeri Turkish; his poems are totally free of even the slightest hue of nationalism; and he was a classic victim of class conflict. One hundred and twenty of his poems are in what is now referred to as Azeri Turkish, seventy or so in Armenian, and about thirty in Georgian. There can be very little doubt that he began by writing in Turkish and Georgian and began writing in Armenian in his thirties. Turkish was the prevalent vehicle for the genre, and Georgian the local standard; together they gave him a much wider audience and the opportunity to compete with other *ašuts*. It has been noted that his poems in Turkish more faithfully reflect the traditional Islamic patterns of the genre in terms of style and devices. Interestingly, it is in these poems that he most frequently speaks of his religious loyalty and religiosity. He had a good command of colloquial Georgian, which emerges as a flexible medium in his poems, especially the ones written in a humorous vein. But most of all, he was at home in his mother tongue, the Armenian dialect of Tiflis.

The patterns of rhyme, rhythm, and meter he employed all derive from the established practice of the tradition, the most intricate of which



he used in his Turkish poems. His imagery and literary references reflect Armenian and Middle Eastern folklore and many common traditions (Majnūn and Laylā, Farhād va Shīrīn, Rustam, the rose and the nightingale, the *Alexander Romance*, etc.). Certain descriptive patterns of women's appearance bear resemblance to those used by Kostandin Erznkatsi, Yovhannēs Tulkurantsi, Grigoris Aṭramartsi, and, particularly, Naṭaš Yovnat'an (q.v.). His imagery is somewhat restricted; the object of his love is most frequently likened to the rose, or to precious stones and metals.

Sayeat Nōvay is an original *aṣuṭ*, head and shoulders above all his confrères. Despite his use of features common to the tradition, his lyric verse stands out with its effusiveness, spontaneity, and dramatic force. Oblivious of the world, he is consumed by his unrequited love, which inspires his contemplative philosophy, his views of the human condition and social inequality, his aesthetic principles, and the values he upheld. His noble sentiments, majestic suffering, stoical optimism, and charming sincerity in large measure account for the continuing popularity of his songs, which are practically free from bilious emotions, despite the unhappy course of his life. The verbal forms he tends to use endow his verse with momentum and energy. And his long lines (sixteen syllables) do not at all slow the pace of his rhythm; each foot is almost complete, self-contained, and the reader feels the prolonged progression of his smoldering agony.

Distilled in Sayeat Nōvay's verse are the accomplishments of Armenian minstrels. It simultaneously refracts and marks the apogee of long-standing, though not so profound, Islamic literary influences on Armenian poetry. The imprint of neighboring traditions is most conspicuous in the *aṣutakan* verse and finds expression in form, prosody, appellation, and certain standard phrases and imagery. Sayeat Nōvay absorbed and blended the best in Islamic minstrelsy with Armenian traditions and created his own profile with inimitable distinction.

**ELIA MUŞELEAN** (1689–?), a restless and adventuresome character, was caught in the murky world of international intrigue and conflicting interests. He was born in the village of Krman, near Hotorjur in the region of Erzerum, to a wealthy merchant father. He was sixteen when his father died and his paternal uncle consigned him to a Jesuit who made an ardent Catholic of him. Elia, fond of the "Franks" and full of desire to study in their country, preached Catholicism for a while. He also engaged in trade, which took him to numerous parts of the Ottoman Empire, Iran, and Russia; he later joined British and Dutch companies working for the



he supposedly extrapolated from Armenian sources. Mesrop Čanašean (1908–74) has made an attempt to mitigate some of this criticism.

**SIMĒON I, EREWANTSĪ**, Catholicos of Armenia (1763–80), is remembered as one of the bright figures in the modern history of the Armenian Church. He reorganized Ējmiatzin, invigorated its spiritual authority and cultural force, and boosted its economic prosperity and political standing. Simēon set up a printing press in Ējmiatzin (1771), the first ever in Armenia, and systematized the archives of the Catholicosate.

*Jambṛ* (from *chambre*, which Simēon used for record or archives) is a mine of information on the Supreme Patriarchate of Ējmiatzin. This is the work of a patriot-administrator-reformer, keen on strengthening the central authority of the Church of Armenia, its independence and particular character. The historical part begins with the apostolic origins of the Armenian Church and the building of Ējmiatzin, and moves on to the return of the Mother See from Cilicia, followed by biographies of his predecessors from Movsēs III, Tatēwatsi onwards (with a stinging attack on Yovhannēs Bališetsi Kolot, whose “machination,” he averred, forced Ējmiatzin to deal with the Ottoman authorities through the Patriarchate of Constantinople, rather than independently) to his own biography, which was sketched by a different hand. Then comes a detailed description of the jurisdiction of Ējmiatzin and other Armenian hierarchies, tithe and taxation, property owned by Ējmiatzin, the irrigation system and water resources, etc. There follows a list of Persian *raqams*, *farmāns* and such documents with summaries of their contents, and a list of Ottoman *fermans* and similar formal records. The final, twenty-fifth chapter enumerates Armenian monasteries in the region of Erevan with their jurisdiction and properties.

His *Yišatakarān* (published by G. Ałaneants in *Diwan Hayots patmūtean*, vols. 3, 8, 11) is a record of the correspondence conducted by the Mother See of Ējmiatzin in the years 1763–79 (compiled, with major lacunae, by Archbishop Isahak Gełamatsi and Yovhannēs *vardapet*). It is a comprehensive record of Ējmiatzin’s relations with the Armenian sees (in Russia, Iran, Georgia, the Ottoman Empire, India, etc.) and local chieftains, rulers, and dignitaries. It covers such matters as pilgrims to Ējmiatzin, especially from the Ottoman Empire; disciplinary measures (defrocking, etc.); nuncios (“nuirak,” in Armenian) and their activities; Armenian Catholic communities (especially in Akhaltsikha); personal letters; modes of operation and channels of communication maintained by Ējmiatzin; finances of the Catholicosate; transfer of moneys across borders in coded messages; regional politics and appropriate bribes; the



printing press in Ējmiatzin; Simēon's furious opposition to novel ideas emanating from Madras to liberate Armenia through armed struggle; and his request to shut down the printing press and burn all the copies of *Nor tetrak or kochi yordorak*. In a word, it paints a detailed picture of the Armenian realities of the time, and of Simēon and his activities, with most useful information on Transcaucasia, the eastern provinces of the Ottoman Empire, northwestern Iran, and certain parts of India. Simēon also maintained a special file for his encyclicals and bulls, which is not extant.

Perturbed by his Church's vulnerability to Catholic inroads, Simēon sought to introduce certain protective measures. In fact, most of the steps he took were reactions to Catholic activities. He made changes in the Armenian calendar of feasts (*Tōnatsoyts*) to counterbalance that published by the Mekhitarists of Venice, and to ensure uniformity of observation, he prepared a calendar for a cycle of 532 years. He moved the feast days for Nersēs the Great, Trdat the Great, Sahak Partew, Maštots, the Translators, and others to Saturdays and called for solemn celebrations. He also replaced a number of non-Armenian saints with Armenian saints, some of whom had been unwavering defenders of the Armenian dogma (e.g. Yovhannēs Ōdznetsi, Yohan Orotnetsi, Grigor Tatēwatsi).

His prayer book, *Girk' alōrits* . . . , radiates piety and patriotism. The prayers, meant for various occasions, express his solicitude for his flock and their monasteries, abandoned or trampled by heathen overlords. But it is in his praise for Ējmiatzin that his religious-national creed crystallizes. Ējmiatzin to him is a God-built, luminous church; the Armenians a nation "cleansed" through the passion of Grigor Lusaworich; and the Armenian alphabet a God-given script. Very popular and still sung in churches, especially on solemn days and in times of uncertainty, is the first stanza of one of his songs opening with, "Rise, O God of our fathers" ("Ari Astuatz hartsn merots").

The last great historian of Armenian traditional historiography and its first major modern figure is **MIK'AYĒL CHAMCHEAN** (1738–1823), a Venice Mekhitarist. No Armenian historian since Movsēs Horenatsi had ventured to undertake what Chamchean accomplished in a grand, magisterial fashion: a three-volume history of Armenia (*Patmutiwn Hayots*) from the Creation to the year 1784, narrated with exuberant imagination and exultant pride. Each of the three parts consists of two books, representing Chamchean's system of periodization: the era of the Armenian ancestors, the Aršakuni (Arsacid) dynasty, the era of "marzpan and ostikans" (the Arab period), the Bagratunis, the Rubenids (Cilicia), and the era of vanished statehood and anarchy (*anišhanutiwn*, used in both senses).



Chamchean listed in his introduction some of the difficulties he encountered: the inaccuracies, interpolations, and inconsistencies in Armenian sources; the unreliability of non-Armenian sources; the discrepancy between the two materials; and a general lack of specific chronology. He compared Armenian variants, sifted the material, and used non-Armenian sources to fill the gaps. For the earliest stages of Armenian history, Chamchean (with some inspiration from Josephus) emphatically asserted the primacy and absolute authenticity of Armenian histories (which meant Movsēs Horenatsi's sources), assaulting all other information (especially early Greek and Latin historiography and literature) as fanciful and, therefore, unreliable. One of the simple reasons for this was that no historian of either tradition gave a record of his own Greek or Latin forebears and their descent from Noah. As for a veracious system of dates, Chamchean used biblical chronology and well-established histories of famous figures and events as signposts for his chronology. The initial part of Chamchean's history, then, has no solid historical basis and is a traditional account at best.

Chamchean consulted a very large number of sources, more than twenty Armenian and over sixty non-Armenian accounts, apart from countless documents such as colophons and letters. No critical editions of the Armenian texts existed yet, and a number of records were still unavailable to him. In some instances he relied on later historians for earlier periods and wrote from a Roman Catholic perspective. Frequently, the reader finds no clear or complete indication of Chamchean's sources, some of which are now undetectable or untraceable. As the first modern attempt at writing a comprehensive history of Armenia, the work has many merits indeed, and it is of extraordinary significance for the seventeenth and the eighteenth centuries. It was also a labor of love on the part of a patriotic monk, for whom the Garden of Eden and Mount Ararat (the resting place of Noah's Ark) were both found in his homeland, Armenia, the cradle of mankind before and after the Flood.

Chamchean held that the Roman Catholic Church never anathemized the Church of Armenia. This line of thought, which Malakia Ōrmanean (1841–1918) considers a major, if not overt, characteristic of the Mekhitarists of Venice, prevails in Chamchean's history and other works. Ōrmanean (*Azgapatum*, ii, 2165) avers that Chamchean, with the approval of his Order, prepared a work titled *Vahan hawatoy* (Shield of the faith), theoretically to justify and tactfully to promote this concept that did not sit well with Latin and Latinizing quarters in Rome and elsewhere. This is not to say, however, that Chamchean or his fellow monks retreated from the Roman Catholic dogma by so much as a hair's breadth; they



simply reinterpreted and reconciled the Armenian position with that of Rome. Being opposed to the creation of a separate Armenian Catholic community and to direct confrontation, they emphasized similarity and union rather than dissimilarity and schism. Chamchean's position would have had far-reaching consequences (e.g., Armenian Catholics frequenting Armenian churches and receiving sacraments), but it was one of the few practical ways in which they hoped gradually to forge a rapprochement between the two churches. In fact, in the early nineteenth century Chamchean was personally involved in unofficial talks in Constantinople to bring about a reconciliation.

Of great importance was Chamchean's grammar of Classical Armenian, which went through fifteen editions in little over half a century. In order to reinstate its earlier structure, Chamchean tried to refute the patterns of Latin fancifully imposed on Classical Armenian—a trend that was carried further by subsequent Mekhitarist linguists of both the Venice and Vienna Orders. Among his published works, special mention should also be made of his ten-volume commentary on the Psalms, with comparative references to Greek, Syriac, Latin, Arabic, and other versions. Still unpublished are some of Chamchean's works including a Latin-Armenian dictionary and an account of his travels.

**ḤACHATUR ĒRZRUMETSI** (1666–1740) was educated in Rome and in Catholic circles and was held in high esteem by them, becoming a monk, a theologian, a philosopher of vast erudition, and a prolific author. Unlike Mhitar Sebastatsi (q.v.), with whom he was intimately acquainted, Ḥachatur seems to have been a man of reflection rather than action. He has a grammar, a rhetoric, a book of sermons, and at least two works in Latin, one on Christianity and the other on theology, both of which were translated into Armenian by Mariam K'arak'ašean and published in Venice.

But perhaps his most practical contribution is his compendium on philosophy, which made some aspects of the accomplishments of European thought in many a field accessible to his fellow countrymen. Brought together in two thick volumes in verse (not without some artificial rhyming) are large sections dealing in detail with topics in the humanities and the sciences, with each major field (e.g., poetry, rhetoric, logic, metaphysics, music, physics, mathematics, geometry, medicine, plants, etc.) divided into subsections. Although Ḥachatur misses no opportunity to inject his interpretations with a goodly dose of Catholic doctrines, his encyclopedic scope is quite unique to his age. One of the largest sections treated seriously is on astrology; it drew fierce criticism from an implacable opponent, Gēorg Mhlayim (q.v.).



and taught at the Lazarean for almost ten years. The Nersisean in Tiflis opened its doors in January, 1825, with Alamdarean as its principal at the request of Catholicos Nersēs V, Aštaraketsi (1843–1857), then primate of the Armenians of Tiflis. Here, under the supervision of Nersēs himself, he was active in recruiting men and support for the Russian Army in its wars against the Persians and Ottomans in the late 1820s, which brought Eastern Armenia under the czar's control. In conjunction with his teaching activities, Alamdarean prepared a number of primers on Armenian and Russian and Russian dictionaries, most of which (with the exception of his Russian-Armenian dictionary, Moscow, 1821) remain unpublished.

Some thirty poems and an incomplete play have secured a niche for him in the history of Armenian literature. He is a poet of transition, associated with previous verse in some ways, but departing from it in others, a fact that has led many critics to see him as a representative of Armenian classicism. Religious concerns and love nurture his imagination. The single most important event inspiring him was the death of his wife, reincarnated in his poetry as a beautiful woman in both body and soul. It is the grief of her untimely departure, which leaves him inconsolable, that informs his sentiments on love and companionship. His pain grows all the more deeper following his banishment to the monastery of Hałpat (1830), which he soon left to become father superior of the monastery of Holy Cross in Nor-Naḥijewan (Rostov-na-Donu). He writes in elegiac but simple Classical Armenian, with a warm imagination and sincerity that made some of his poems popular. His use of the "rose and nightingale" device, unlike earlier practice, is in a lucid Classical Armenian free from Persian imagery and words and holds no hope for the nightingale: no spring will ever bring the rose to life again.

### Western Armenian Literature

**LEWOND ALIŠAN** (1820–1901) was both a voluminous and luminous author who commanded profound respect among his fellow countrymen and enjoyed wide recognition in European scholarly circles. What initially brought him popularity was the collection of his poems, *Nuagk*, published in 1857–58, and *Yušikk hayreneats hayots*, a collection of inspiring portraits and episodes from Armenian history. There followed his massive volumes on the history, geography, topography, and flora of Armenia (*Širak, Sisuan, Ayrarat, Sisakan, Hay busak*, etc.); works of historical and philological nature (*Hay-Venet, Šnorhali ew paragay iwr, Hayapatum*, etc.); and the publication of numerous texts, including the series titled *Sop̄erk haykakank*. Ališan made a number of translations such as Canto IV from *Childe Harold*, Schiller's "Die Glocke," and a collection titled



*Knar amerikean* (i.e., American Lyre with works by N. P. Willis, Andrews Norton, Bryant, J. G. Whittier, and others).

*Nuagk* appeared in five volumes. The first volume, *Mankuni*, includes prayers and religious exhortations for children. The second contains a number of occasional verse of little value, but also some of his better, reflective poetry, as well as his still better poems dedicated to nature. The third volume, *Hayruni*, represents his patriotic songs, including the cycle of eleven poems subtitled "Ergk' Nahapeti" (i.e., Songs of the patriarch), long recognized as the crown of his verse. Volume four, *Tēruni*, is made up of poems on religion, religious feasts, and saints. Volume five, *Thruni*, has human suffering, death, and the plight of émigrés as its main subjects.

Religion, faith, and patriotism dominate Ališan's work. Any search for dissension from Christian tenets on the Creator, the Creation, and human behavior would be a futile attempt. He cared, he said, not a whit for life on this planet, especially his own; but earthly concerns such as the misfortune of his fellow countrymen always troubled his compassionate soul. This frail and frugal monk himself in his early thirties extinguished the brilliant fire fueling his creative imagination, forever silencing the poet in him. His lavish poetic gift and his passionate disposition combined to create a formidable force, too dangerous for a monk. He marked the occasion with a moving poem bidding farewell to the muse ("Husk ban ar Ogini nuagahann," *Nuagk*, v) and wishing eternity would immediately swallow him up.

Save for the cycle titled "Patriarch's Songs," all of his poetry is in Classical Armenian and has since been inaccessible to the public at large. Mekhitarist theorists are not entirely alone in their contention that Ališan is at his best in the ancient tongue. What has been appealing to them has been his subject matter (religious, moral, and meditative) and his form and style (classical, majestic). The influence of Chateaubriand, Lamartine, Hugo, Goethe, Schiller, and Byron has been noted as beneficial. Those who read Classical Armenian will most likely agree that his talent does indeed shine in many poems, though the quality is strikingly uneven overall and much of it is difficult to salvage. The "Patriarch's Songs" are overrated and overemphasized by Soviet Armenian critics and somewhat berated by Mekhitarists as the *ašutakan* strain in Ališan's verse.

Most of Ališan's patriotic songs as well as his "Patriarch's Songs" appeared in the third volume of his verse titled *Hayruni*. Figures and episodes from Armenian history sparked his imagination (King Trdat the Great; the military leaders Mušel, Vardan, and Vahan Mamikonean; King Ašot II, Erkat; the Aršakuni [Arsacid] dynasty; the battles of Dziraw and



Vardanank', etc.). The boisterous noise in some of his poems often seems to replace, or cover up, rebellious sentiments unutterable by a monk. His best poems, though few in number, are memorable. Of particular note are the ones dedicated to nature, to the heroes of the battle of Awarayr, and to the sad fate of his fatherland, in which he ponders over or thunderously complains of the afflictions befallen his people, in a tone of glowing pride and patriotism. Ališan's patriotism, it must be noted, despite its not-so-infrequent militant strains, was a cultural and in many ways a passive patriotism. It nonetheless had an enormous impact on the reading public, arousing a sense of unity, pride, and patriotism throughout the 1860s.

Ališan is among the earliest authors to write romantic verse (of nationalism and nature) in Modern Armenian, and thanks to this he has clinched a permanent niche in the history of Armenian literature. Ironically, he was a profound admirer of Classical Armenian and considered it far superior to the spoken idiom. His fame has far outlived his influence, for he has had some impact on a number of contemporary writers in terms of style, as well as topics he chose from Armenian history.

**MKRTICH PĚŠIKT'ĀŠLEAN** (1828–68) found himself in the midst of some dramatic developments in the 1860s. In 1862, Zeitun (now Süleymanlı, Turkey) erupted against the local Ottoman authorities. Pēšik-tāšlean marked the occasion with a cycle of poems, but suggestions that he was involved in organizing this bold act of defiance seem to be unsubstantiated. Soon thereafter the so-called Armenian "constitution" was promulgated (1863), generating unrealistic expectations of a political nature. Both events, allied with the theater and patriotic poetry of the period, account for much of the romantic euphoria of the 1860s, to which Pēšik-tāšlean himself contributed to some degree.

Pēšik-tāšlean was active in organizing some of the earliest theatrical performances and in founding two societies: *Hamazgeats* ("National") and *Baregortzakan* ("Beneficent"), both of which promoted education and agricultural work. One of the loudest cries heard at this juncture was the call for unity transcending religious-denominational boundaries as the Armenian Catholics and Armenian Protestants had by now been formally recognized by the Ottoman government as separate communities. Pēšik-tāšlean's "We are brothers" ("Ełbayr emk' mek") echoed and embodied such sentiments and brought him popular acclaim. His transient glory also partly rested on his dramas, some of which he acted in himself.

Sensing public dissatisfaction with the performances he staged in Classical Armenian (original and translations), Pēšik-tāšlean increasingly relied on the emerging new vernacular, but never fully shed the influence



wretched people), tackles social injustice and moral corruption through the story of two lovers, who as actors commit suicide on stage. These plays are reckoned to be among the earliest works of romantic drama. They enjoyed wide popularity and certainly had an impact on the rising tide of patriotism at the time. But they were the initial experiments of a teenager, and even though they occasionally glisten with his genius, they have not worn well.

**MATTĒOS MAMUREAN** (1830–1901) was a writer, translator, educator, public figure, celebrated editor and publicist, and one of the more prominent representatives of the Armenian community of Smyrna, the second largest center of Armenian culture in the Ottoman Empire. He was well-versed in English and French letters, and played an important role in promoting Western literature and cultivating a readership. He also contributed to the emerging Western Armenian standard. His *Angliakan namakani* (English letters) highlights patriotism and the cause of enlightenment in Armenia and the dire consequences of emigration. *Haykakan namakani* (Armenian letters) focuses on the contemporary Armenian scene, especially the issue of the so-called Armenian constitution and constitutionalism, and portrays some of the well-known public figures of the time, including Grigor Ōtean (Krikor Odian Efendi) among others. His *Sew lerin mardē* (The man of the black mountain) remained incomplete. The background to the novel is the Russo-Persian War of 1826–28. The novel is intensely anti-czarist, partly because of the failure of the Russians to compensate in tangible political terms the assistance the Armenians had given them during the campaign in Transcaucasia. In his popular monthly, *Arewelean mamul*, which he founded in 1871, Mamurean covered a very wide range of social, cultural, literary, educational, and political issues of considerable importance.

**YAKOB PARONEAN** (1843–91) is the first great master of sweeping satire, vivid humor, and comedies of unsurpassed popularity. An ethical purist and a self-appointed arbiter of the social scene, this expert of demolition left hardly any contemporary person or issue of import untouched. If the public respected him, many of his victims looked daggers at him, and some denounced him. The periodicals he published, although popular, never paid the bills as the not-so-numerous copies sold circulated among wider circles of non-subscribers. No source of supplementary income ever enabled him to free himself of the clutches of poverty. This and the failure of his campaign to reform society through whiplash words seem to a certain degree to have affected the mood and mode, if not pertinacity, of his satire.



Paronean's political criticism is found in his minor journalistic pieces and columns, particularly in "Ksmitner" ("Pinches," published in *Tatron*) and "Im dzeratetrë" ("My notebook," published in *Pordz* of Tiflis). In the early 1870s, he threw his unqualified support behind Patriarch Mkrtich H̄rimean (q.v.) and his efforts to have the Armenian constitution revised. From Europe he chose Don Carlos (1848–1909) and the Carlist risings (1872–76) to poke fun at freely, with no restrictions imposed by the Ottoman censorship. But both issues receded from his sight as he exposed the consequences of maltreatment and inequality in the Armenian provinces of the Ottoman Empire, arising from the corruption and inefficiency of Ottoman officialdom and the nature of the Ottoman political system. As the Balkans erupted in rebellion, leading to the Russo-Ottoman War of 1877–78, which in turn gave rise to the Armenian Question as an international issue, Paronean punctured the pious pretensions of the European powers in pithy chronicles and with biting sarcasm. He ferociously attacked Ottoman internal policy, especially with regard to the Armenians. No contemporary Armenian observer has so perspicuously evaluated the diplomatic entanglements and political rivalries of the time, maintaining all along that the very foundation of such selfish policies was the same old adage: might is right.

The *National Big-Wigs* (*Azgayin jojer*) contains some of Paronean's brightest satirical pages. Paronean owes its conception to the biographies published in the French periodical *Le Polichinelle* rather than to Plutarch's *Lives* or Mattēos Mamurean's *Haykakan namakani* (Armenian letters). Some writers such as Ōtean and Zōhrap (q.q.v.) benefited from Paronean's experience in their satirical and non-satirical biographies. All biographies begin with the birth of a given celebrity and evaluate the negative aspects of his activities. Except for a few, all portraits are critical. Some are written with annihilating satire. The portraits include figures active in public affairs, priests, editors, artists, writers, and celebrities. There were some omissions, such as Grigor Ōtean (Krikor Odian Efendi, 1834–87), Yarutiwn Tatean (Artin Pasha Dadian, 1830–1901), and Servichēn (Serovbē Vichēnean, 1815–97), who all served the Ottoman government. All portraits are cast against a background of contemporary Armenian realities that come alive in these lives. There are portraits with some protraction and verbosity, and a reading of them without appropriate annotation of the contemporary scene is difficult. But overall they are highly original, despite the obscurity of their circumstances, and they scintillate with wit or elicit sardonic smiles with their devastating satire.

Paronean's comedies mark the earliest stages of the genre in modern Armenian literature. His first experiment seems to have been *Erku tērov*



*tzaray mē* (A servant of two masters), a comedy with a very simple plot, inspired by the second and third acts of Goldoni's work of the same title. His next comedy was a musical (in the European sense) called *Atamnaboyžn arewelean* (The oriental dentist), and it bears much brighter marks of his comical genius. It ridicules quacks as well as the predictable consequences of incompatible marriages. *Šotokortē* (The flatterer), lacking a concluding scene, was later completed by Eruand Ōtean (q.v.). The structure of this comedy and some of its protagonists echo Molière's *L'Avare* and also reflect Paronean's continuing search for his own comic characters. This he accomplished some fifteen years later with his best comedy, *Paltasar Atbar* (Uncle Balthazar).

*Paltasar Atbar* is a most, if not the most, popular play in the Armenian comic repertoire. Not surprisingly, Balthazar has been interpreted both as a stupid wealthy man, who is made a laughingstock, and as a simple honest person worthy of sympathy. The former is the result of the considerable resemblances this work bears to Molière's *Georges Dandin* and is typical of the Western Armenian theatrical tradition; the latter is a tendency one observes among the Eastern Armenians, which, ideological changes and pursuits notwithstanding, has found expression in the acting of such celebrated Soviet Armenian actors as Hrachya Nersisyan (1895–1961) and Mher Mkrtchyan (1930–93). Nersisyan accentuated the tragic aspects of this character, and Mkrtchyan stressed the comical ones. Balthazar is decidedly not a replica of Georges Dandin; nor is he, to be sure, a tragic figure. He is a victim of many a circumstance and a comical hero derided for many a reason, despite Paronean's express aim to lampoon the Armenian Judicial Council for its incompetent handling of divorce. The whole work is an enduring tribute to Paronean's vibrant wit, so brilliant that it alone sustains the third act, despite its insignificant relevance to the plot.

Paronean was the first to introduce satirical biography, and the laurel for the first satirical novel goes to him, too. There can be little doubt that Molière's *Les Fâcheux* prompted the form of Paronean's *The Most Honourable Beggars* (*Metzapatiw muratskanner*). Both works are collections of portraits, but their similarity ends there. Paronean wrote the novel to illustrate the misery of the men of letters and the cruel indifference of the wealthy to literature. No sooner does Abisołom Ała, the central figure of the novel, arrive in Istanbul from Trebizond in search of a wife, than the "intellectuals" stand in a long queue to pay him their respect and pilfer money from him. Most of the characters disappear after making a memorable appearance. Paronean had sympathy but no kind words for most of the intellectuals, particularly the poet, whose portrait,



along with the numerous excursions Paronean makes in the novel, reveal many aspects of Paronean's literary views. No less well-liked than Uncle Balthazar, the text of *The Most Honourable Beggars* has been tampered with in Soviet theaters in Moscow and Erevan for political purposes. Both the Eastern and Western Armenians have converted this work of rich dialogues into an ever-popular comedy.

A greater sense of urgency and an unrestrained invective characterize most of Paronean's works written in the 1880s. *Ptoyt mē Pōlsoy taterun mēj* (A walk in the quarters of Constantinople) is a detailed description of thirty-four city districts, touching nearly upon all social, cultural, and economic realities of the Armenian community. *Tzitzat* (Laughter), it has been suggested, was conceived under the influence of Casti's *Gli Animali Parlanti*, but the two works have nothing in common besides animal characters. *Tzitzat* is a collection of fables tackling social and moral issues against an exclusively Armenian background. *Ahtabanutiwn baroyakan* (Moral pathology) is an incomplete portrayal of Hypoptos (suspicious), Stenokardos ("narrow-hearted," impatient) and Philargyros (avaricious). Paronean's *Hōsaksutiwnk merelots* (Dialogues of the dead) appeared after he had translated parts of Lucian's work. He drew on the Greek author's work only for the form of his allegorical work. Personified here are virtues such as Compassion, Truthfulness, Charity, and Merit who have assembled in the World of the Dead to analyze aspects of moral decline that resulted in their banishment from the World of the Living. *Kalakavarutean vnasnerē* (The disadvantages of courtesy) sparkles with Paronean's wit and shows in uproarious dialogues the inconveniences a polite person suffers for the impoliteness of others. Paronean also published a periodical, *Tiyatro* (1874–75), in Ottoman Turkish, treating mainly issues of social nature pertinent to the Ottoman public at large.

Almost simultaneously with Raffi (q.v.), **TZERENTS** (1822–88) inaugurated the genre of the historical novel. Armenian history had captured his imagination at St. Lazarus, where the Mekhitarist monk and playwright Petros Minasean (1799–1867) taught him history. If Minasean instilled in him a love for Armenian history, what he saw in Constantinople in large measure gave shape to his interpretation of that experience. Particularly in the 1850s and the 1860s, tension, to put it mildly, ran high between the Armenian Apostolic community on the one hand and the Armenian Catholics and Armenian Protestants on the other. The former two were also rent apart by internal strife. The Catholics were divided into two camps: a Latinizing faction that called for direct control by



language and literature. Her mother was active in the fields of education and charity and in some ways left her imprint on her views. But the impetus for the cause and some of the themes she chose seems to have come mainly from George Sand. She launched her career with a few poems in the 1860s (including one dedicated to Arsēn Bagratuni and another to Mkrtich Pēšiktʿaşlean, q.q.v.), only to realize quickly that she was not made to be a poet. After a long silence (during which she attended to her family), her work appeared again in the early 1880s in the periodical press, flashing signals of the tone and scope of her novels to come. Indeed, she soon wrote three books declaiming against social prejudice that reduced women to “serfs” or to objects “owned” by their spouses.

*Mayta*, a romantic epistolary novel, outlines the plight of a helpless widow. Totally dependent on her husband before his death, Mayta is now kept in fetters in an unequal and intolerant society and is unable to have a life of her own. She corresponds with Sira, an advocate of full freedom for women and essentially a mouthpiece of Tiwsab. The novel polarized the Armenian intellectuals. Some authors unequivocally supported Tiwsab, others (e.g., Grigor Zōhrap, q.v.) questioned the social and moral premise of the novel, and still others (e.g., Yakob Paronean, q.v.) criticized its form and style. Pointing to elements of *deus ex machina*, for instance, when Mayta is rescued *in extremis* by a total stranger, Paronean argued that the plot was unconvincing. As the debate lingered on, Tiwsab published her second novel, *Siranoyš*, casting the character of yet another victim deprived of free choice, love, and identity. She too, like Mayta before her, is unable to break through the barriers of convention and meets a tragic end. Not so Arakʿsia, the heroine of Tiwsab’s third and last novel, *Arakʿsia kam varžuhi*; she is lucky enough to marry the man she loves. Despite some serious flaws in both form and content, Tiwsab’s romantic vision of women was the spirited expression of a genuine concern that Armenian writers could no longer ignore.

**MKRTICH HRIMEAN** (1820–1907), affectionately recognized as “Hayrik” (Armenian for “father,” with the endearing diminutive “ik”) was a luminous religious and political figure throughout the second half of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. But he has been given a spot in this introduction for his literary effort, which in the history of Armenian literature is distinguished on two accounts. He was among the earliest writers to turn his attention to the soil of Western Armenia proper, rather than to the communities in the Armenian Dispersion. Thus, he paved the way for a generation of authors who mirrored life in the homeland (Sruandzteants, Tlkatintsi, R. Zardarean, q.q.v., and others).



Of his two long poems in Classical Armenian, *Hrawirak araratean* tells of the land of Ararat, and his *Hrawirak erkrin aweteats* tells of the Holy Places. He lamented the deliberate burning of the Armenian section of Van in *Vangoyž*, and the anti-Armenian atrocities in the 1877–78 Russo-Ottoman War in his *Haygoyž. Drahti ėntanik* (A family of paradise) reflects his concerns for the family. *Sirak ew Samuēl* offers words of wisdom for the young on a wide range of topics. His *Papik ew toṛnik* (Grandfather and grandchild) speaks with profound love of land and husbandry and of the interdependence of man and land (and homeland). In a sentimental and romantic frame of mind he cast himself as the continuator of Movsēs Horenatsi's lament in his *Oṭbatsot Horenatsin* (The mourning Horenatsi) and promoted peace and prosperity for all nations, big and small, in his *Tagaworats žoṭov* (A meeting of kings).

**GAREGIN SRUANDZTEANTS** (1840–92) is the author of a number of poems and two historical plays, all of which are insignificant except for the poem dedicated to the “Martyrs of Awarayr,” the Vardanank’ (beginning “Tē hayreneats psakadir . . .”). But his efforts to attract the attention of observers, literary and otherwise, to the realities of life in the Armenian provinces of the Ottoman Empire, and perhaps more importantly, his boundless diligence in collecting and introducing Armenian folklore materials, have been of inestimable value. In a span of ten years (1874–84), he published five collections containing topographical, ethnographic, and statistical information, as well as folk tales, songs, riddles, customs, excerpts from manuscripts, colophons, and other such material that has had a noteworthy impact on the course of Armenian literature. There followed a generation of Armenian writers who wrote from life in Armenia proper, rather than life in big cities to the west (e.g., Constantinople) or north (e.g., Tiflis) of the country, and writers such as Tumanian and Aṭayean (q.q.v.) wrote adaptations of many of the folk tales he published. The first and one of the best versions of the oral Armenian epic tale, *Sasuntsi Dawit kam Mheri dur* (David of Sasun), recited in the dialect of Muš, was published by Sruandzteants in 1874.

**ARPIAR ARPIAREAN** (1851–1908) owes his popularity as much to his oeuvre as to his literary and cultural activities. He has come to symbolize Armenian realism as both the mentor of the generation of realist writers and as one of the earliest authors to write in a realist vein. Initially, the forum was the daily *Arewelk’* (East or Orient) founded in 1884, and the new prose found expression predominantly in the new genre of the short story, called *noravēp*, the equivalent of nineteenth-century French *nouvelle* or *conte* (Flaubert, Maupassant), or in novels



rather than in specific or localized expression through plot and characters, emerged as a preponderant feature of his short novels. *Yarō*, *Hovkul*, and *Ėnkuzin kotovë* (The walnut basket) written in a refined style free from Classical Armenian forms, illustrate the point and stand out as some of the best short novels to mark the concluding part of his literary career. During the Armenian massacres of the mid-1890s, like so many of his colleagues, he fled Constantinople, never to return. He contributed to *Masis* and *Arewelk* from abroad, and in 1910 he wrote a drama jointly with Mik'ayēl Kiwrčean (q.v.), *Prkank* (Ransom), about a marriage of convenience that does not materialize when the dowry is lost. Regrettably, to his death almost three decades later, Kamsarakan abandoned literature for business.

**GRIGOR ZŌHRAP** (1861–1915), acclaimed as the prince of *noravēp* by Aršak Chōpanean (q.v.), sought insight into the unusual and unexplored realms of human behavior, especially that of women. He began his literary career as a polemicist, composed some poetry, launched his notorious attack on Srбуhi Tiwsab's views of women's emancipation, and wrote one of the earliest novels. But it is with his shorter novels and stories that he made a permanent name for himself. Allied with his literary fame was a bright public side to this man of shining intellect, tempestuous emotions, and impeccable appearance and manners, which put him in the limelight as one of the foremost, if not the leading, writers and public figures from the early 1890s onward. He practiced and taught law, and was an articulate and outspoken member of the Ottoman Parliament and the Armenian National Assembly. He was active in promoting the Armenian Question, particularly immediately before World War I. Shortly after hundreds of Armenian intellectuals had been rounded up on 24 April 1915, Zōhrap too, despite his close connections to some of the highest ranking members of the Young Turk clique, was arrested, shipped to the interior, and put to death in a most brutal fashion somewhere between Diyarbekir and Urfa. (One prominent Young Turk, Halil Mentēse, claimed to have attempted to arrange for Zōhrap's return from the interior, while another, Sait Halim, spoke of his protest, cf. *Harp kabinelerinin isticvabı* [The interrogation or rather "hearings" of the wartime cabinets], Istanbul, 1933, 214–16, 295–96).

His earliest poems are of no memorable merit, and the few he wrote much later had an almost lubricious touch to them. *Anhetatsatz serund mē* (A vanished generation), his first and last novel (since *Nardik* remained incomplete), reckoned to be the first novel in a realist vein, was well received. It tackles the issue of unalloyed love as the foundation of



happy marriages. The theme was not new, but Zōhrap's approach was. Although he himself qualified it as an unsuccessful experiment, a mixed bag of romantic and realist sensibilities, it was nonetheless unmistakably a very promising beginning. His bright talent, though, would blossom in his short novels, *noravēps*, three dozen or so in number. When Srбуhi Tiwsab (q.v.) published her *Mayta* and raised the question of women's emancipation, Zōhrap, then in his early twenties, countered the novel with a vitriolic attack denying women equality. He believed that the happiness promised by a woman was nothing but an illusion women exploited to gain power. Furthermore, he believed that women were a source of misery and misfortune in social life. Echoes of this negative attitude are audible in some of his prose. In a number of his *noravēps*, Zōhrap deliberately sought out anomalous positions and exceptional, or rather untypical, characters, which shocked some of his readers, especially those with deep-seated convictions who were impervious to change, inquiry into the unexplored, and taboos. His sinewy style—simple, direct, precise, dispassionate, and often laced with irony—was yet another element contributing to such rejection. Moreover, Zōhrap's work generally exhibits a disdain for the conventional, a sense of boredom on the part of a man for whom life seems to have no more veiled secrets, and an anxious search for the more fulfilling aspects of existence. But that Zōhrap conceded no social role to women, and that he saw their beauty as their greatest charm is an undeniable fact. Yet it is also true that in most of his work, women, whether good or wicked, weak or strong, fleshly or decent, are of pivotal importance and are paradoxically depicted with profound sympathy.

Many other themes attracted Zōhrap's attention: the Armenian establishment (i.e., the Patriarchate and the rich), the victims of economic hardship, the plight of immigrants from the provinces, poverty, the shift in moral standards, religion, feigned piety, and so on. All this he wove into an economical prose that delved into the human soul in a limpid and elegant Modern Western Armenian, with little or no attention to context and plot. He was intimately versed in French culture, which had a formative and lasting impression on his thought. In forging the Armenian tradition of *noravēp*, Zōhrap creatively assimilated the accomplishments of A. Arpiarean (q.v.), Maupassant, and to a lesser degree, those of Zola and Daudet.

*Ējer utewori mē oragrēn* (Pages [or Excerpts] from the diary of a traveler) is an intellectual annotation to his own world view, occasioned by his travels in Germany and France. A keen power of observation, disarming wit and reason, and a noteworthy ability to sketch characters in a few broad strokes distinguish his collection of seventeen portraits



of contemporary or newly deceased public figures, titled *Tzanōt dēmker* (Familiar names). Still scattered in the periodical press are most of his literary reviews and articles of diverse nature, bursting with energy and informed by a critical spirit, in support of the cause of progress and public interest.

**LEWON BAŠALEAN** (1868–1943) was recruited into journalism early. Together with A. Arpiarean (q.v.), but somewhat overshadowed by him, he was the moving spirit behind *Arewelk*, *Masis*, *Hayrenik*, and *Nor keank*, the first three of which pioneered and propagated the realist movement. In his articles and *chroniques*, he covered with lucidity and intensity the whole gamut of topical issues, making ceaseless efforts to rid his diction of Classical Armenian forms. For the 1880s witnessed a revival of sorts in the usage of Classical elements and phrases with ideological (i.e., conservative), rather than linguistic, undertones. These writings form an essential part of his literary heritage and embody, as do his short stories and *noravēps*, his realist credo of literature as a mirror of human life.

There is, though, a glowing, romantic touch to some of his short, uncomplicated stories, lit up by his talent in bright but brief emissions. Here he is at his best, writing with precision and grace. He was among the earliest authors to focus almost exclusively on working-class and poor people, their trials and tribulations and lifestyle, in the closing decades of the nineteenth century. A call for spiritual fortitude permeates his work, of which the following comprise some of the best aspects of his literary effort: "Nor zgestē," "Łalatioy Řestē," "Kaľand," "Tselin dzaynē," "Siwzēni varpetē," "Ays ē eľer," and "Hmayat'apē." He engaged in business in the last forty years of his life, completely disengaging himself from literature.

**ELIA TĒMIRČIPAŠEAN** (1851–1908) was a popular and gifted writer. He was frail and eccentric; the death of his father, his younger brother, and particularly his mother precipitated his mental derangement, and clear symptoms of insanity appeared by 1900. A somewhat schizoid recluse, Tēmircipašean maintained that Goethe's *Die Leiden des jungen Werthers* was one of the greatest influences of his life as was Positivism (Auguste Comte, Herbert Spencer). Above all, however, Emile Littré was a demi-god for him. He devoted his energy entirely to literature and literary journalism. Many of his works are still scattered in the periodical press.

"Eľia," as he was affectionately referred to by his contemporaries, wrote both verse and prose (short stories, literary criticism, articles, essays, diaries, etc). His poems (personal anguish, death, love, nature, philosophical contemplation) are of a descriptive-analytical and often cerebral



novelists and was fond of Gothic novels. One may venture to suggest that he was familiar with M. G. Lewis's own work, too. His novels speak to this, and from his introduction to *Vēp Varsenkan*, it is obvious that he wittingly strove to combine entertainment with practical purposes. His effort to cultivate a love for reading among the Armenians was a challenge for many contemporary and subsequent writers.

The epigrams he wrote are witty, and his subtle and warm poetry reflects trends of romanticism. Love and patriotism are central themes to him, and religious motifs are not found in his work. Most of his long poems are incomplete. The best, perhaps, is *Sōs ew Sondipi*, in which the central figures' love transcends national and ethnic boundaries, and healthy patriotism promotes harmony. Taġiadean's passage from classicism to romanticism is best illustrated in this poem written in Classical Armenian, structured in accordance with the norms of Classical poems, and has gods among its heroes. It also has an adventuresome plot with action and suspense; it uses short, lyrical lines; and it probes the individual's inner life.

**HACHATUR ABOVEAN** (c1809–48) has been placed on a pedestal as the father of modern Armenian literature. Although there is much to be said for this posthumous veneration, many have questioned the wisdom of such zealous ranking in literature and other fields of culture. This is not an uncommon practice, but it was carried to extremes, especially during the Soviet years, leaving many worthy contemporaries in the shadow of the chosen "fathers" or "masters." At the very least, such rigid adoration easily turned into a sort of cult and precluded objective evaluation and revisionism. Abovean, an original, prolific, and multifarious writer, did indeed usher in a new era in Eastern Armenian literature. But it is not possible to speak of any palpable influence on his part on Western Armenian literature, especially in its formative stages. With much of his work (books, essays, articles, and collections of a historical, educational, linguistic, ethnographic, and folkloric nature) published decades after his death, its implied impact remains open to question. His *chefd'œuvre*, *Vērk Hayastani* (Wounds of Armenia), alone, also published posthumously in 1858, is good enough to recognize him as the founder of modern Eastern Armenian literature.

Abovean launched his literary career by writing verse in Classical Armenian. Patriotism, love, nature as well as meditative themes preoccupied him initially. He jettisoned the traditions of classicism and gradually wrote in a romantic mood, especially during his years at Dorpat (Tartu, Estonia). There his exposure to European, especially German, culture and literature came to inform his poetry and dramatically exposed the



appalling backwardness that prevailed in his fatherland. The duality in his work in these same years was a reflection of his encounter with the West, as he simultaneously composed poetry akin to that of Armenian minstrels. His satirical bent found its best expression in "Hazarpešen" (a sort of wine pitcher), in which he criticized the Russian bureaucracy. *Parap vaḥti ḥatalik* ("Pastime," or "Entertainment for spare time") he reportedly adapted from notes he took in public gatherings. It is a collection of fables in verse, written in a lucid style with many dialogues that castigate moral degeneration, vice, injustice, and the corrupting power of money. Classical Armenian gradually gave way to Modern Armenian, well stocked with dialect and slang, which eventually emerged as the literary standard for the Eastern Armenians.

His use of the spoken dialect, especially in his *Wounds of Armenia*, has been one of the predominant factors Armenian critics have cited to justify his exalted position. What emboldened Abovean to challenge tradition was his desire to reach "hundreds of thousands" of people, as he put it in his preface to the novel. But two points must be emphasized here: he was not the first author to use Modern Armenian; and like many of those who supported the modern vernacular, he looked upon it as a temporary means or as a stage of gradual transition to Classical Armenian. But his immediate concern—to bring knowledge to the masses—totally submerged this distant and somewhat impractical expectation.

Abovean considered the vernacular and faith as the very pillars of the Armenian ethos. *The Wounds of Armenia* is, among other things, a hymn to the Armenian language, whose loss, Abovean averred, would be tantamount to losing national identity. His concern for the fate of his people was inextricably intertwined with that for the mother tongue. But there were other factors in addition, concepts and aspirations that could be conveyed only through this cherished national idiom.

*Vērḵ Hayastani* is a heart-to-heart dialogue between the author and his people. Abovean, who unlike many of his colleagues was born and spent most of his life in what was left of Armenia, fully understood and shared the mentality of his people and grasped all too well the consequences of ignorance and corruption within the ranks of Armenian priesthood. The political plight of his fellow countrymen under the Persian khans was profoundly painful to him. And the survival of his nation against overwhelming odds throughout its history was a delightful source of pride and respect for Abovean. All this inspired him to write a novel that extolled patriotism, loudly justified self-defense, castigated ignorance and illiteracy, and called upon his fellow countrymen to break away from their ignoble lassitude to restore Armenian statehood.



*Vērē Hayastani*, one of the earliest novels in Armenian literature, has a simple plot. Its idealized central hero, Ałasi, the first rebel in modern Armenian literature, fights and dies for the liberation of his country. In this case it was the annexation of the Khanate of Erevan by Russia in 1828, the background against which the novel is set. This was the deliverance from Persia that many Armenians, Abovean among them, had been waiting for with great anticipation. So excessively zealous is Abovean's praise for Russia that one might be tempted to mistake his gratitude for undignified cringing. The fact is that Abovean was already disillusioned with Russian policy in Armenia when he wrote the novel in the early 1840s. In 1836 the Russians had instituted the *Polozhenie*, which imposed severe restrictions on the Church of Armenia. In 1840 they had abolished the *Armianskaia Oblast'* (Armenian Region) as an administrative unit and were now interested in an Armenia without Armenians. Was Abovean being faithful to his intoxicated sentiments some fifteen years earlier? Probably. He would most likely have moderated his tone had he written the novel a year or two before his disappearance, when his attitude toward Russia had turned openly and bitterly hostile. He had envisaged the Russian presence in Armenia as the first step towards the revival of Armenian statehood under the wing of the northern power. By then, that vision must have vanished into thin air.

Despite its flaws, such as didactic digressions and protracted dialogues and descriptions, the novel's sustained intensity, animated style, colorful imagery, patriotism, and overwhelming outpouring of sincere emotions have made it a highly popular novel that has had considerable impact. Historically speaking, it tackles a burning issue, that of the future of his people, and depicts rebellion against foreign domination in sharp contrast to Christian Armenian traditions of pacifism and passivity. It captures a momentous period in Armenian history; true, one imperialist was being replaced with another, but Russian annexation proved beneficial in the long run in that, unlike their brethren in the Ottoman Empire, the Eastern Armenians were physically safe. Understandably, then, much was made of Abovean's political orientation later in Soviet Armenia, and his disappearance added a touch of mystery to an unfortunate life given to lofty ideals. Nonetheless, his retrospective aggrandizement, well-deserved in many respects, was often unnecessarily tainted with ideological motivation. Wounds of Armenia, his *cri du cœur*, is a gem in the Armenian literary tradition with or without such idolization.

MIK'AYĒL NALBANDEAN (1829–66) was an impassioned author and a propagandist of reform and renewal. His travels widened his horizon,



and his entanglement in national and political affairs led to conflicts with local Armenian dignitaries and religious authorities and eventually with the czarist government. He met some of the leading publicists of the day abroad, including Stepan Oskanean (1825–1901), the editor of the biweekly *Arewmutk* (Paris), and Yarutiwn Sēvačean (1831–74), the founder and editor of *Meḥu* (Constantinople). He also came in close contact with the so-called “London Propagandists,” notably Alexander Herzen and Nikolay Ogaryov, and with Mikhail Bakunin and Ivan Sergeyevich Turgenev. He was arrested in his birthplace in 1862 and found guilty of association with the “Propagandists,” of disseminating their literature in Russia, and of inciting anti-government sentiments among the Armenians. After his initial internment in St. Petersburg, he was exiled to Kamyshin in the region of Saratov, where he died within months of his arrival.

Nalbandean attracted attention as an outspoken publicist and polemicist whose lively and bold style, at times crude and arrogant, was almost invariably laced with irony or sardonic in tone. Early on, he collaborated with Stepanos Nazarean (1812–79), a bright intellectual and founder of a new and influential periodical, *Hiwsisapayl* (“the northern lights,” aurora borealis, 1858–62, 1864), in which Nalbandean published some of his prose. In both his literary and journalistic pieces, Nalbandean emerges as an unrelenting champion of freedom and equality; a fearless opponent of despotism, imperialism, and serfdom; an interpreter of human life from materialistic positions; a tireless propagandist of enlightenment, science, and scientific approach; a believer in agriculture as the key to prosperity and independence; uncompromisingly anti-clerical; and a zealous supporter of Modern Armenian. A large body of literature and evidence, amassed by Soviet Armenian critics, establishes him as a revolutionary democrat.

His writings are not extensive in number or volume. His short novel *Minin hōsk miwsin harsn* (i.e., a bride promised to one but given to another) negates superstition and promotes enlightenment. *Meṛelahartsuk* (Necromancy) is among the earliest urban novels, but is incomplete; it would likely have dealt with ignorance had it been finished. His popular *Yišatakaran* . . . (something akin to a journal) deals, in a sarcastic and sometimes polemical fashion, with a very wide spectrum of topical issues of a social, political, and cultural nature. His literary views are distilled in his criticism of Perč Prōšean’s novel, *Sōs ew Varditer*. For him literature was a vehicle for reform, a harmonious amalgam of the natural with the creative, brought together with a sound unity and structure and skillful characterization. He called for the creation of a national literature



(reflecting the realities of a given nation and its concerns and aspirations), good examples of which were H. Abovean's *Vērk Hayastani* and P. Prōšean's *Sōs ew Varditer*. Of his non-literary prose, mention should be made of *Erkragortzutiwnē orpēs ulit čanaparh* (i.e., Agriculture as the right path, published under the pseudonym Simēōn Manikean), which summarizes his views on economic, social, and political injustice and disparity, on nationalism and nationhood, on Armenian emigration and inter-communal and international relations, and on the 1861 reform in Russia.

Nalbandean has a small number of poems, with the earlier ones in Classical Armenian, fashioned mainly in a patriotic-political, satirical, or reflective mood. He has poems dedicated to Apollo, Mesrop Maštots, and Rousseau, among others. But his poems in praise of liberty and his "Song of the Italian girl" brought him enduring fame and found some imitators. The latter, believed to be an adaptation, was adopted with some textual patch-up as the national anthem ("Mer hayrenik") of the Third Republic of Armenia.

**ĀPĀYĒL PATKANEAN** (1830–92) was a compatriot of Nalbandean who believed, like his confrère, in the utilitarian role of literature. Encouraged by Nikolay Karamzin's views, he chose to use the spoken vernacular for poetic expression; learning from Nikolay Nekrasov he strove to become a "poet-citizen." This descendant of a family with a distinguished tradition in Armenian letters combined teaching with writing—a dual role characteristic of some of the authors of the age, including H. Abovean, S. Šahaziz, P. Prōšean, and Ē. Ałayean (q.q.v.). As part of his literary mission, he sought to bring enlightenment to his fellow countrymen and to ignite their patriotism. He had no time for poetic form or craftsmanship. He felt that it was a time for immediate action on what he perceived as essential needs of a people in distress. Although too many of his poems read like rhymed speeches, his sincere and emotional patriotic appeal resonated with the prevailing mood. Some of his better poems brought him wide public acclaim and propelled him to the forefront of poetry for a number of decades.

Launching the initial phase of his career with a series of merrymaking and drinking songs in the best traditions of the Armenian students at Dorpat (Tartu, Estonia), Patkanean formed a literary coterie in Moscow with two colleagues for the purpose of publishing their own literary works. The group called itself Gamar K'atipa (a combination of the initial letters of their first names with the vowel *a* inserted between them: Gēorg, Mnatsakan, Āpāyēl; and the first two letters of their last names:



K'Ananean, T'ymurean, Patkanean). Patkanean soon assumed the group's name as his pen name, as the overwhelming majority of poems published in the series (in five parts, 1855–57) were written by him. Following this and the appearance of his collection in 1864, there occurred a hiatus in Patkanean's literary career.

But by then he was a well-established name. Two poems in particular met with immediate success and have been among his few enduring pieces. "Arak'si artasukč" (The tears of the river Araxes) is a dialogue between the poet and the river. The river is in an utterly despondent mood in view of the misery and dispersion of its children, and has avowed to remain in mourning until the causes have been removed. Personification and dialogue generate an intimate dynamism; grief and a sense of irretrievable loss, which never quite explode into anger, convey an unspoken yet audible sense of optimism and sustain the appeal of this song. The other poem, titled "Vardan Mamikoneani mahē" (The death of Vardan Mamikonean), owes something to Lewond Ališan (q.v.) and to his poem on Vardan Mamikonean ("Plpuln Awarayri") for its conception. This time it is the moon that narrates Armenian history, down to the Battle of Awarayr that pitched the Armenians against the Persians in 451. One of the more popular parts of this long poem is "Vardan's Song" (Vardani ergē), a call to arms against the treacherous oppressors of Armenia.

Patkanean expressed his contagious patriotic enthusiasm in a number of other poems, attacking clergymen for lulling the faithful into inaction, castigating the apathetic to national concerns, and condemning the formal, impractical aspects of national identity and its detractors. But there is frustration, anger, and embittered sarcasm in the poems he wrote following the Russo-Ottoman War of 1877–78. Often crude in diction, these poems capture the mood of utter disappointment that gripped the Armenians in the wake of the Treaty of San Stefano and the Congress of Berlin. The cause of reform in the Armenian provinces of the Ottoman Empire, whether through direct appeals to the Ottoman government or through European pressure upon the sultan, was now dead. As the maltreatment of the Armenians worsened, Patkanean was among the first to express sympathy for the Western Armenians in the heartland around Muš and Van. Echoing H. Abovean and M. Nalbandean and paving the way for Raffi (q.q.v.), Patkanean urged his fellow countrymen to resort to self-defense, a trend that gathered rapid momentum. Europe got a piece of his mind too; he denounced it in harsh and contemptuous terms for selfishly abandoning the Western Armenians.

Patkanean's social and patriotic concerns found expression in the verse (*Nor Nahijewani knar*) and prose (mainly short stories from life



in his birthplace and a few set in St. Petersburg and Moscow) he wrote in his native dialect of Nor Nahijewan. One frequently encounters his satirical vein and biting impatience in these writings that deal with dehumanizing social and political injustice, incompetent and corrupt local officials, wicked and greedy merchants, illiterate and incompetent priests motivated by material rather than spiritual ends, and a degenerate youth.

A junior contemporary of Patkanean and Nalbandean, **SMBAT ŠAHAZIZ** (1840–1907) was of a more modest talent. His first collection of verse (in Modern and Classical Armenian) touched on historical and patriotic themes, nature, and love. His second collection was markedly better than his first and mirrored his social concerns and patriotic aspirations. The dominant piece in this collection is his long poem “Lewoni vištē” (Levon’s grief), a distillation of his literary vision, notable for expounding a contemporary theme. It is the story of a young patriot dedicated to the welfare of his homeland. He sets out from Moscow and arrives in Armenia through Nor Nahijewan and Tiflis. Throughout, the reader hears Lewon’s observations regarding superstition and ignorance, intellectual, moral, and religious decline, servility, corrupt leadership, etc. Lewon’s fervent wish is to do away with all such evils and brighten the skies of Armenia with enlightenment and progress. Even though the poem concludes without the reader ever seeing Lewon engage in any kind of action to bring about change, and despite its lack of drive and action, passion, and punch, it was very well received and certainly left its mark on its readers. Although Šahaziz ascribed the birth of the poem to the “reformist” atmosphere in Russia of the 1860s, which we have no reason to disbelieve, and despite the fact that he received his intellectual nourishment mainly from Russian writers (Pushkin, Lermontov, Nekrasov, etc.), Byron looms large in the formal aspects of the poem’s conception.

Šahaziz the journalist dealt with a variety of topics: from literature to the plight of the Armenians in the Ottoman Empire and from imperialism and China to an evaluation of self-centered European civilization (he once branded it as an intellectual “syphilisation”). In his articles as well as in his romantic poetic output, Šahaziz’s style is sluggish and his technique gauche. He saw himself as a servant to the cause of enlightenment and liberty through a literature expressed in simple (simplistic, in fact) language. His poetry did serve its purpose at the time, and together with the work of M. Nalbandean and R. Patkanean (q.q.v.) it paved the way and set the agenda for the next generation of poets. Very few of his poems are now remembered. Of these “Eraz” (Dream; opening line: “Es lsetsi



**PERČ PRŌŠEAN** (1837–1907) profoundly admired and derived inspiration from H. Abovean (q.v.), but he had neither his master's scope nor his impact. His prose was prolix and often plain. His first novel, *Sōs ew Vardifer* (proper names), brought him fame and prompted an important critical review by Mik'ayēl Nalbandean (q.v.). This love story revealed his power of observation, his fascination with ethnographic and "national traditions," and an as yet dim awareness of some changes affecting rural Armenia. Only sixteen years later did his second novel appear. Titled *Kruatzalik* ("A bone of contention"; two men competing for the same woman) and mirroring the closing decades of the eighteenth century, it speaks of Persian maltreatment, makes a faint call for self-defense, criticizes local Armenian dignitaries and clergymen, echoes social biases and inequality, and pictures an ideal village reconstructed by traditionalists. Being fond of the traditional lifestyle in the countryside, Prōšean dreaded urban life. He recorded faithfully and regretfully its disintegration under the impact of some evil factors to which he never reconciled himself (Soviet Armenian criticism has seen in him a writer immune to class consciousness), but he hoped that decent, thoughtful, and enlightened men might still salvage the vanishing world of his childhood and dreams.

Three years later, Prōšean penned his masterpiece, *Hatsi ħndir* ("A matter of bread," i.e., struggle for survival). The novel, qualified as realistic, documents the destruction of traditional lifestyle and changing economic and social values in rural areas due to the penetration of monetary relations and mores. The novel is head and shoulders above all else Prōšean wrote; it reads well and has enriched Armenian literature with a few memorable characters (notably Mikitan Sak'o). Similar in theme and structure and almost as good was his fourth novel, *Tsetser* (tsets = moth, i.e., "parasites"). His next novel, *Bldē*, also has some merits, such as a certain degree of psychological insight into Bldē's criminal obsession with money. His *Yunon* is a kind of Armenian Robin Hood and in many respects marks a departure from some of his literary patterns. Prōšean has two more novels and numerous short stories. As a respected teacher, he made valuable contributions to the cause of education; as an individual endowed with considerable administrative skills, he lent much support to the Armenian theater.

Few modern Armenian writers can rival the impact and appeal of **RAFFI** (c1835–88). He began with poetry of no particular merit save for one popular poem, "Dzayn tur ov tzovak" (Respond, O, Lake), which is reminiscent of Lewond Ališan's personification of the moon and Rapayēl Patkanean's personification of the river Arak's. A romantic to the marrow,



he moved on to prose and captured his readers' imagination and, arguably, the foremost spot in the genre with some of his historical novels. His numerous short stories and short novels of a social nature are set mainly in Iran (depicting both Armenian and Persian realities) and Tiflis and are a savage attack on the social injustices, predatory landowners and merchants, tyrannical bureaucrats, moral corruption, superstition and ignorance, tradition and submission that account for the sad life of the trampled and dispossessed. Perhaps his best works focusing on such concerns are *Oski akatal* (Golden rooster) with its protagonist, a petty bourgeois who is a slave of money and the quintessence of such vices as fetishism and cruel inhumanity, and *Hachagoti yišatakaranē* (The memoirs of a robber), in which poverty drives men into criminal conduct. In Raffi's view, human behavior is shaped by its milieu; removing or improving bad conditions will transform human character for the better. Hence his firm conviction that enlightenment and education is an all-powerful recipe for social and moral progress. Only such enlightened individuals, collectives, or nations can sue for political justice.

When the Russo-Ottoman War of 1877–78 broke out, the Eastern Armenians expected Russia to wrest Western Armenia from the Ottoman Empire. Though the Russian victory brought bitter disappointment to the public, the war and its aftermath ignited Raffi's imagination. Responding to political situations in a string of historical novels, he formulated his vision of the ultimate mission: the gradual liberation of Armenia. *Jalaled-din* is named after a Kurdish chieftain who drowned Armenian villages and towns in blood with impunity. Raffi pits sons and fathers against one another; Sarhat, the central hero, blames his father for not opposing evil and dies fighting for his family and country. Raffi's disapproval of all religions, particularly Christianity (as a "passive" creed) and Islam (as an "aggressive" religion), his intolerant criticism of Armenian clergymen as ignorant parasites who preached blind obedience to oppressors, and his promotion of self-defense as a legitimate right form some of the basic elements of his political thought and are reinforced in all his novels.

Having faith in neither Europe nor Ottoman nor Russian imperialism or in the Armenian leadership and organizations, Raffi looked up to the "crowd," the educated and well-informed masses, to bring about radical change. Part of his mission was to cultivate a readership, because the reading public was so small. The elements of suspense, mystery, and adventure that occasionally appear in his work are meant to sustain interest in reading and thereby feed the public with new concepts of social and political justice. Social reform, as said, would breed reformed individuals, and reformed individuals would build a new blissful world.



This and certain elements of his ideology of liberation are the two essential messages conveyed to readers by Raffi's *Hentš* (The fool), whose plot unfolds during the Russo-Ottoman War of 1877–78. Raffi never quite called for armed rebellion; the Armenians were not ready for that yet. But he zealously promoted self-defense as the most dignified and legitimate human right. This and a myriad of ideas pertaining to the unenviable plight of his fellow countrymen in the Ottoman Empire, along with possible ways of bringing political relief, are raised and discussed in Raffi's *Kaytzer* (Sparks), which many an observer have considered the bible of the modern Armenian liberation movements. Indeed, its impact on contemporary political thought and action has been enormous. Although not a novel in the conventional sense, it is the story of a group of students (including a number of characters who also appear in *Hachagoti yišatakaraně*) who work in or visit Western Armenia. They observe and analyze the Armenian realities under the Ottoman yoke and explore options and possible ways of alleviating the plight of their fellow countrymen.

Next, Raffi turned to the latest episode of self-defense, still fresh in Armenian memory: Dawit' Bek's successful, short-lived struggle in Siwnik', Armenia. This was a more sophisticated novel and brought into sharper focus two elements in Raffi's thought: that disunity had been a major factor in the downfall of Armenian statehood, and that treachery had been a national trait. He interrupted *Dawit' Bek* and delved into his "melikdoms" of Khamsa (*Hamsayi melikutiwnnerě*), a study of the history and fall of local Armenian rulers in Artsakh-Karabagh, who had been autonomous well into the nineteenth century. The project was undertaken with a view to collecting additional material for *Dawit' Bek* and to reviving and evaluating the latest manifestation of Armenian political power in the region. Soon thereafter, Raffi completed his *Paroyr Haykazn* (i.e., the rhetorician Proaeresius, A.D. 276–367/8), a short prose work contrasting Movsēs Horenatsi's dedication to the progress of his own nation with Paroyr Haykazn's contribution to the progress of an alien society.

On the surface, the 1880s looked strikingly tranquil and uneventful. Following the failure of the Armenian Question, the Armenians and their hopes seemed to have sunk into a miasma of despair. In fact, it was a pregnant tranquility. The Armenian political parties were born, and major shifts marked a new course for Armenian literature, most notably the rise of realism. What came as a sudden and painful jolt was the re-emergence of Russian chauvinism, one of the ominous consequences of which was the closure of Armenian schools. *Samuēl* was Raffi's response



to this unjudicious Russian measure. Construing the Russians' acts as a devastating attack on the Armenian language, which in his eyes was comparable to an attack on the very essence of the Armenian ethos and the sole bond of unity for a nation in dispersion, Raffi recalled the specter of a similar threat by Persia in fourth-century Armenia.

Armenian historians speak of Samuël, the central hero, in only a few terse phrases. He was a descendant of the venerable Mamikonean family and killed his own father, Vahan Mamikonean, for apostasy. Raffi expanded this act of patricide into an extensive novel cast against the background of a massive Persian campaign to supplant the native tongue and culture with their own. The novel illustrates selfless patriotism; transforms the abstract concept of Armenia into a geographical and topographical entity, a peopled land bustling with traditions and collective experiences; promotes national unity; restores continuity to Armenian identity by viewing the Christian tradition as both a modified version and a continuation of the pagan Armenian lifestyle; and endorses militant action in defense of country and identity.

Raffi publicly complained that Armenian authors had no clear picture of the Armenian society of old. He was envious, he said, of such writers as Sir Walter Scott and Georg Ebers (whose *Eine ägyptische Königstochter* and *Samuël* share certain remote resemblances), who were fortunate to have ample historical material at their disposal. (Actually, Ebers himself collected much of the information he used in his novels.) To create a semblance of fourth-century Armenia, Raffi relied on his own imagination, on whatever information he could glean from Armenian sources, and on lifestyles he observed in remote regions, especially in Iran where change would have crept in rather slowly, he contended. It may never be possible to determine how close or off the mark Raffi was in his re-creation of daily life in fourth-century Armenia. Given the benefit of the doubt, it may be assumed that he was satisfactorily imaginative if not altogether authentic. But his reading of this very intricate era in Armenian history is revealing. He was one of the earliest writers, perhaps the earliest, to peer at the realities of the time and make incisive observations on a number of issues: the decentralized nature of political power in Armenia, the negative effect centrifugal forces had on Armenia, and the bloodstained conflict between church and state in the fourth century.

There are a number of instances of anachronism and protraction in this work, but some of the lateral connections are of practical importance. Raffi's women are virtuous patriots, and Meružan Artzruni, whom we know to have been a powerful political personality, comes through as a rather petty quisling. Raffi removes Samuël from the thick of action



for a long stretch of time to illustrate the calamities the traitors and the Persians inflict on the country and to justify Samuēl's inescapable decision to commit patricide amid harrowing mental agony. This renders Samuēl's character somewhat remote. But as the novel races to its dramatic conclusion, he re-emerges as a heroic, if tragic, patriot owing much of his charm and force to the character of Vahan Mamikonean, his own father and arch enemy, whom Raffi portrays in masterful strokes as an intelligent and determined man of strong convictions. Raffi wrote in an excellent Modern Eastern Armenian.

**LAZAROS AĀYĒAN** (1840–1911), endowed with an energetic talent, was a multifarious writer but not as voluminous as some of his contemporaries. There is something utopian about the sum total of his work. He liked Edward Bellamy's projection of a new social and economic order and translated the initial parts of Bellamy's *Looking Backward: 2000–1887* into Armenian. When admonished by his younger colleague and protégé, Yovhannēs Tūmanean (q.v.), he replied that Bellamy made much more sense than Marx and Engels. Like Bellamy, he particularly liked to juxtapose the idealized future with the ugly present and longed for the disappearance of private enterprise and the appearance of some kind of a communal lifestyle. His adaptations of Armenian folk tales, well-suited to his own edifying purposes, inaugurated a trend emulated by Y. Tūmanean, A. Isahakyan, and later by S. Zoryan (q.q.v.). They also illustrated his belief in well-rounded education and the importance of acquiring dexterous skills or practical crafts (e.g., his folk tale titled "Anahit"). He prepared numerous popular textbooks and taught tirelessly. He thoroughly enjoyed teaching children and took the lead in creating wonderful poems and rhymes for them, many of which are still fondly recited. His best piece in verse is his adaptation of the tale of Tork' Angel (from Movsēs Horenatsi), whom he recast into a patriot and a loving, gentle giant in a community of a similarly colossal creatures, but one where there are no masters and slaves.

His first novel, *Arutiwn ew Manuēl* (proper names, 1867; revised and supplemented 1888–93), is actually an autobiographical collection of vignettes. Elaborating on his use of the form "Arutiwn" for "Yarutiwn" (resurrection, John), he said it stood for the Armenian word *arutiwn* (courage, fortitude) and not for the popular or corrupt form of Yarutiwn. From these sketches emerge the sad childhood and early years of AĀyean, who launches a "courageous" assault on old ideas and teaching methods. His next work was a shorter novel titled *Erku koyr* (Two sisters). It is the unhappy love story of two sisters, a cry for social justice, equality of men



and women, and the problem of land-tenure in the Armenian realities of the 1870s. Like R. Patkanean (q.v.) before him, he tried an incomplete adaptation of K'yor-Ölli (Köroghlu, a bandit, or perhaps a Jelali rebel, and central character of a romance, reminiscent of older accounts of a hero avenging the blinding of his father; these older accounts, it has been suggested, are also echoed in the story of Aršak II, King of Armenia; cf. H. Pērpērean, *Aršak B. ew K'eōrōllu*, [Paris, 1938]). But unlike Patkanean, he wrote it in prose and portrayed K'yor-Ölli not as an Armenian patriot, but as a hero with no specific ethnic identity, who wages wars against oppressors, rulers, and sultans to protect the poor and champion the cause of freedom.

Ałayean has numerous articles discussing various aspects of the emerging literary standard. He was carefully attentive to language and the subtleties of its use and wrote in a neat, simple, and flexible Eastern Armenian, providing a model for his younger colleagues to emulate and improve into a fine tool. But the charm of his idiom is only one of the elements making his literature attractive. In questions of form and substance, literary values and approaches, his literature was distinct from that of his contemporaries and certainly illuminated a more clearly delineated path for the future of Eastern Armenian letters.



and continuity that extended into antiquity, above and beyond the very symbols that defined the status of Armenians in the empire, namely, the Church and Christianity. This was yet another attempt to foster the political element in the Armenian self-image. Abovean had long since proclaimed language and the Church as two of the most fundamental pillars of the Armenian ethos, and many writers were of like mind. But Raffi, and now Siamant'ō and Varužan, placed much emphasis on pre-Christian Armenian culture, the homeland, and the vernacular. A number of short-lived periodicals, such as *Nawasard* and *Mehean* (both published in Constantinople on the eve of World War I), promoted national and literary rejuvenation and similar concepts. *Nawasard* covered literature and the arts in general. *Mehean* focused on literature, and, proclaiming its allegiance to the Armenian-Aryan spirit, called for a cultivated, purified Armenian as the vehicle for a new literature, free from politics and the ravages of journalism. But the most striking literary expression of such shifting values at this juncture was Siamant'ō's poem "Mesrop Maštots," published just as the Armenians in Constantinople celebrated with pomp and pride, before the envious eyes of the Young Turk leadership, the fifteen-hundredth anniversary of the invention of the Armenian script and the four-hundredth anniversary of Armenian printing.

## A Survey of the Literature of the Age

### Western Armenian Literature

**ARŠAK CHŌPANEAN** (1872–1954), a prolific and multifarious author, wrote both poetry and prose (*noravēps*, short stories, prose poems, etc.), as well as essays, articles, and literary criticism. With unflagging determination, he promoted the literary and artistic accomplishments of his nation through lectures, studies, and translations from Armenian into French and vice versa. He also founded and edited the celebrated literary-cultural periodical *Anahit*, cited extensively in this work. So wide was his embrace that he left barely any topical issues untouched. Such activities, conducted in an almost missionary zeal, may indeed have drained his creative, literary energies.

Nonetheless, Chōpanean remains an important figure in the history of Armenian literature, particularly verse. His poetic oeuvre is adorned with few first-rate poems, but as a whole it helped pave the way for subsequent Western Armenian poets. Counterbalancing the treacly clichés of sentimental poetry and the rigidity of formal poetry, Chōpanean emphasized the significance of image and emotion and supplanted the excessively flowery, convoluted expression, often mistaken for sophistication,



with a simple and at times ordinary diction. In this sense, he played for Western Armenian verse a role somewhat akin to that played by Hovhannes Hovhannisyan (q.v.) for Eastern Armenian poetry. He was also among the earliest poets to take to Western forms, taste, and sensibilities, channeling such aspects and accomplishments into Armenian letters. In a similar vein, he emerged as the central figure in forging the formative stages of literary criticism. His studies of Grigor Narekatsi, Nahapet K'uchak, Nalāš Yovnatān, Mkrtich Pēšikrašlean, Petros Durean, and others laid the groundwork for the tradition.

Personal sentiments, universal suffering, love, nature, and patriotism are some of the themes he sang in his poems in a warm, spontaneous style. He was well-versed in world, especially French, literature. And Yakob Ōšakan (q.v.) has seen traces of influence of the Romantics, the Parnassians, and the Symbolists in his work. His short prose pieces tackle social themes pertaining principally to the lower and poor classes.

**SIAMANTŌ's** (1878–1915) verse is unique in a number of ways. Thematically, it has a very limited range; almost exclusively it tells of the horrors suffered by his nation. In terms of form, it has been suggested that his free verse (which is not quite that) owes something to Verhaeren's *vers libre* and Paul Fort's experiments in poems in prose and the emphasis he placed on cadence. The suggestion needs further elaboration, but it is true inasmuch as Siamantō wrote in free verse. In the 1890s and 1900s, many Armenian writers searched for and experimented in new ways of expression.

Siamantō's first work, a slim cycle of poems, *Diwtsaznōrēn* (Heroically), in effect prefigured his poetic world. It speaks of centuries-old persecution and butchery of his people (particularly the massacres of the mid-1890s), and evokes and justifies the espousal of defiant aspirations for the ideal, the dream, and the sacred aim. Long-dead martyrs for the cause of freedom rise from their tombs and triumphantly pursue the struggle with the still oppressed crowd. Morbid images (akin to "deep images") and scenes, ghosts, apparitions, and selflessly fighting masses mingle to create an atmosphere of haunting hyperbole. The abstract symbolic forces of fighters for freedom are replaced by contemporary heroes in his next collection, *Hayordiner* (Armenians), made up of three cycles. The background is once again the gruesome images of death and destruction, blood and corpses, and chilling terror that deny mercy and laxity, nurture vengeance, and urge unceasing struggle until victory. The poet calls on the "masters of thought" to come out of their "halls of dream" to sow the seeds of heroism and on the "hooded mystics" (the monks) to arm



themselves with the arms of the shattered cross, all while pouring bitter contempt on the hypocritical West. There are tender moments that bring the gloom into even darker focus. But the author never lets go of the thread of hope. Amid unbearable anguish, his apocalyptic voice thunders messages of determination, self-reliance, and relentless pursuit of the ultimate dream.

His third collection, titled *Hogevarki ew yoysi jaher* (literally, Torches of dying breath and hope; i.e., something like Flickering flames of death and hope), is also a threnody on the carnage of his people, but one that lacks the exhortations to revenge and rebellion he had made in his previous collection. The slaughter of Armenians in Adana (Cilicia) in 1909 prompted his next book, *Karmir lurer barekamēs* (Red news from my acquaintance, i.e., Bloodstained reports from a friend). It consists of twelve reported episodes, which Siamantō recast in his own style into deeply disturbing narrative poems (e.g., in "Parē," The dance, naked women are made to dance to exhaustion and then burnt alive). On a visit to the United States in 1909, he wrote and published his last collection, *Hayreni hrawēr* (An invitation to [return to] the native land, 1910). In twelve moving pieces, in a lyrical style not always entirely free from sentimentalism, Siamantō admonishes his fellow countrymen residing abroad, making an impassioned, heartfelt appeal for them to return to their families and the homeland they have abandoned.

In the early 1910s, Siamantō very slowly moved away from the realm of pain and darkness. The theme must have seemed to have run its course, and new sources of spiritual fortitude had to be explored. Siamantō turned to pagan Armenia, like Daniēl Varužan, in whose *Hetanoserger* (Pagan songs) the trend found its fullest expression. Having rejected Christian tenets of pacifism and passivity, Siamantō in his poem dedicated to Anahit, the goddess of fertility, supplicates her to give birth to a new invincible god, begotten by the sun. His last major poem was an effusive encomium for Maštots, originator of the Armenian script, commemorating the fifteen-hundredth anniversary of its invention. (Nersēs Mezporean, 1841–80, and Stepanos Nazarean, 1812–79, had earlier written odes to *Mayreni lezu*, i.e., mother tongue, sharing similarities so striking as to suggest a common source of inspiration or adaptation, but neither had the impact nor the symbolic significance of Siamantō's poem). As usual, Siamantō wrote these two poems in an epic breath and a sonorous style. But they both lacked the emotive power of his formidable imagination, his foremost strength in his earlier collections. On the whole, his work suffers from a certain amount of verbosity and repetition, declamatory patterns, mixed metaphors, and a lack of depth. Today, many of his poems



make for difficult, monotonous, and uneasy reading. It is difficult to say in what new spheres his imagination would have hovered, had he not been silenced at age thirty-seven in a conflagration unlike any he described.

**MISAK METZARENTS** (1886–1908) is one of a handful of Armenian poets who redefined and refined the Armenian poetic canon with vision and finesse at the turn of the century. His two collections, *Tziatzan* (Rainbow) and *Nor tater* (New songs), published in the spring and autumn of 1907, were met by some with harsh, if distasteful, criticism claiming, among other things, that his work was infested with Symbolism, an alien malaise unacceptable to Armenian traditionalists. A larger army of admirers went to the other extreme, refusing to acknowledge all traces of Symbolism in his art.

Metzarents knew by his early teens that his years were numbered (he suffered from consumption), but unlike Petros Durean (q.v.), he neither allowed the black specter of death visibly to color his utterances, nor did he defy fate rebelliously. Nor did he escape into Vahan Tērean's distant visions, undulating in the mist of melodic melancholy. There was an air of elevated and deeply moving insouciance about the way in which he touched upon his destiny, women, and love. The real world was the abode of his noble sentiments, refracted in a bright, but never dazzling, interplay of colors. This is to say that he read nature particularly well, viewing its vitality with a discerning eye and listening to its rhythm with a musical ear. A heartening optimism mitigated his profound sorrows, channeling them away into the light enveloping him, and grief gave him renewed strength to carry on with the business of life. He worshipped the sun—as a flame, not as a massive conflagration—and caught the infinite manifestations of light, releasing them in varying shapes and shades into many of his poems, including the nocturnal ones. His unalloyed, boundless altruism, now in the form of the wind touching everybody on the forehead in sympathy; now as the cuddlesome evening descending upon all; and now as a hut awaiting the arrival of weary travelers, was at once a source of inspiration and solace for him. His amatory expressions are dreams, prompted by a heart languishing in an unquenched thirst for love. This is perhaps best illustrated in one of his most popular poem-songs “Gišern anuš ē . . .” (“Sweet is the night . . .,” titled “Sirerg” = Lovesong) where the author, inundated with kisses from the sea, air, and the light embracing him, longs for the “only” kiss, the ultimate seal of happiness.

Like his predecessor, Petros Durean, and his contemporaries Tumanian, Isahakyan, Siamantō, Varužan, and Tērean (q.q.v.), Metzarents formed new compound words and endowed some old words with new



nuances. He paid meticulous attention to form and wrote effortlessly, in a crystal clear, elegantly compact Western Armenian with fresh, vibrant imagery all his own.

DANIĒL VARUŽAN's (1884–1915) first collection of verse, titled *Sarsuñner* (Sensations, or *Frissons*), is a small volume that expresses some social concerns. His next book, *Tselin sirtě* (Heart of the race, i.e., nation), deals with a much wider variety of concerns and aspirations. It opens with a poem dedicating it to the fatherland, the Armenian émigrés (*panduh*), the victims of sword and fire, his home and parents, and the Armenians fighting for the national cause. There follows a prologue titled "Nemesis," depicting the carving of a statue of the goddess of retribution. Varužan calls on his people to worship the goddess, but to destroy her statue and cult as soon as tyranny is abolished. Having set the tone to the entire collection, Varužan then groups his poems under three headings: "Baginin vray" (on the altar of sacrifice), "Krkēsīn mēj" (in the arena), and "Diwtsaznavēper" (epic poems). With passion and verve, Varužan asserts in the first part that his fellow countrymen have long been victims of Ottoman religious fanaticism and chauvinism. He juxtaposes some of the darkest moments in the Armenian experience with spiritual vitality and moral strength (e.g., the poems on the ruins of Ani, the spirit of the fatherland, the red soil, the massacres of the mid-1890s and Adana, 1909), while he unceremoniously buries "the God of Lusaworich [Gregory the Illuminator] and Nersēs [the Great, A.D. fourth century]." In the second and third parts, he amplifies the theme of spiritual fortitude: e.g., *Revival* ("Veratznutiwn"), *The Victor* ("Yałtołě"), etc.; invokes the god Vahagn for his prowess and calls on him to make peace with his "renegade" people; and promises justice and liberty to the Armenian victims of the Armenian-Tatar (i.e., Azeri) clashes of 1905–06.

Enamored of pagan life, many elements of which are found in this collection, Varužan wrote a whole new cycle of poems, *Hetanos erger* (Pagan songs). The second part is titled *Golgoṭayi tzalikner* (Golgotha flowers), and in contrast to the first it is a bitter indictment of the machine age and its devastating consequences of cruel exploitation, poverty, moral corruption, and other manifestations of human degradation in ugly, monstrous urban centers. The first is a splendid, if controversial, hymn to life in luscious (and at times even lascivious), glittering imagery, fusing the colors of the East and the art of the West. Širvanzade (q.v.) attacked it (the poem "Ov Lalagē," in particular) as pornography, but numerous colleagues and critics came to Varužan's rescue. He is singing, in innocent elation, of passion and sensual sensations and the beauty of the



female body, at times in somewhat suggestive settings. It is the concept of fertility and cycle of life, the inextricable intermingling of pleasure and pain, that endow the collection with a putative air of eroticism. It is decidedly not pornographic, though in an instance or two Varužan does sing of Eros rather than Agape. Nor is there on the part of Varužan a call to return to an era he brought to life in such bright colors as in the narrative poem, "Harčë" (The concubine), the collection's brightest jewel. Varužan's intention was to unveil and liberate the pagan tradition, perceived by him as an age of prowess, valor, and the aesthetically beautiful, to undermine the bleak aspects of Christian tenets that clipped the wings of human spirit, and to shape and solidify the will to live. The influences of E. Verhaeren, M. Maeterlinck, Rig-veda, and the rich colors of the Flemish masters have been pointed out. To these influences one should perhaps add Parnassian poetry, with its emphasis on formal and visual, rather than emotive, aspects.

Varužan's last collection was *Hatsin ergë* (The song of bread), which tells the entire story of obtaining flour, from ploughing the land to the water mill. The cycle is believed to be incomplete, lacking the six poems that would have put the baked bread on the table. The manuscript was confiscated at the time of his arrest by Ottoman Turkish police on 24 April 1915, but it was recovered after his murder and published in 1921. Bucolic poems of an idyllic setting, ablaze with the colors of sunrise and sunset and various other hours of the day, recount the routine of industrious peasants engaged in the "sacred" labor of producing bread. It opens with the poet's appeal to the muse to teach him all about bread, followed by twenty-eight poems, interspersed with songs, romantically idealizing a tranquil, blissful lifestyle. This is the fatherland in its simplest, most precious form. Popular expressions, sparingly applied, add charm and authenticity to his style. He conjures up delightful images infused with light, colors, and warmth—one of the most celebrated, enduring, and endearing aspects of his poetic genius.

**RUBĒN SEWAK's** (1885–1915) output is small in quantity but contains a good many impressive pieces in both verse and prose. His *Karmir girkë* (The red book), made up of three poems inspired by the Armenian massacres in Adana, was the only collection to appear in his lifetime. He was not in the same league as his great contemporaries, but his warm, sincere, and spontaneous poetry, like theirs, marked a turning point in the history of Armenian verse in a modest way. Social inequality and injustice, corruption, human bondage, the transience of life, and issues of universal harmony and the aesthetically beautiful emerge as some of his



major concerns. His sentiments are rebellious in poems (which seem to have been born in a hasty outburst), protesting, with a tinge of pessimism, the brutal way in which his fellow countrymen were treated.

The short pieces he published in the periodical press were put together posthumously as a volume under the title *Bžiškin girkēn prtsuat̓ ējer* (Pages, or Extracts from the diary of a physician). It is an uneven medley of short stories, *noravēps*, articles, and narratives that speak of the observations of a physician who encounters matters of life and death daily. The theme was new, as was the setting for many of the sad episodes. One of Sewak's intentions was to show that death could be delayed or defeated if certain conditions were met (change in personal lifestyles, removal of ignorance, etc.). Sewak's immense sympathy for those in affliction, his thoughtful reflections on human life, and his rapid narrative style make some of these writings enjoyable reading.

**ARTASĔS YARUTIWNEAN** (1873–1915) attained fame as both an influential literary critic and as a gifted poet who sang of love, dreams, and nature with a vexed heart. But his poetic glory faded as rapidly as it had risen, some years before his life was brought to an end in 1915, and it is his critical sketches of contemporary authors and analyses of particular literary works that are still of value. An incisive observer, with a subtle artistic discretion, he wrote short reviews that are distinguished for their insight, wit, and *élan*, never mincing matters and never shying away from giving his detractors some of their own medicine in terms of temperamental responses and repartee in the periodical press of the day. To him, the role of a critic was to detect, publicly appreciate, and, if need be, propagate the intrinsic values of a literary piece as a consummate individual creation. He designed the famous survey, published in the form of a questionnaire in the literary periodical *Masis*, on the future of Western Armenian literature. Looking at literature as a repository and as a reflection of the past and present experiences of his people, expressed in and consonant with the particular and paramount aesthetic-literary character of the Armenian people, Yarutiwnean publicly raised a long-standing concern regarding the future of Armenian literature. More to the point, the question he asked the Armenian intellectuals was whether Constantinople (an alien, cosmopolitan home of an Armenian community) or the eastern provinces (the original homeland and thus a "purer" Armenia) of the Ottoman Empire were the genuine and, therefore, the more fertile ground for Armenian letters. Yarutiwnean unequivocally favored the latter. The response to the questionnaire was disappointingly meager. But regardless of the answers, no power would have deflected the



course of this natural trend, which was initiated by Mkrtich Himean (q.v.). Were it not for 1915, "provincial" literature, it seems, would have rivaled and complemented that produced in Constantinople as an indispensable part of the national tradition.

It is difficult to say in what other ways Yarutiwnean's flair for criticism would have manifested itself had his life run its normal course. But what we have from him is a string of short evaluations confined to contemporary literature, lacking the sweeping grasp of canon-shapers, such as that of his close friend, Yakob Ōšakan, or that of Aršak Chōpanean (q.q.v.), the forerunner of them both and chief originator of the tradition. For all three, intellectual sustenance and guidance came mainly from French sources. Yarutiwnean had a masterful command of French, and according to Ōšakan, he contributed to French periodicals under a pseudonym. Ōšakan also mentioned that Yarutiwnean read seldom but deeply. Based on what the former has recorded and on what one can glean from Yarutiwnean's own writings, Yarutiwnean was familiar with Kant, Heine, Schopenhauer, and, particularly, Nietzsche; Byron and H. Spencer; and among French philosophers, the writers and critics Joachim du Bellay, Ronsard, A. Comte, V. Cousin, H.-F. Amiel, Littré, Leconte de Lisle, Gabriel Tarde, A. France, the French Symbolists, and especially Remy de Gourmont. He read the *Mercure de France* religiously, but had no particular interest in Bergson and chose to disregard Taine, maintaining that his influence had already waned.

**VAHAN TĒKĒEAN's** (1878–1945) army of admirers is probably outnumbered by those indifferent towards his art. His first collection produced two sharply contrasting reviews but mainly went unnoticed. The second appeared when Metzarents, Siamantō, and Varužan had already published their best work. When his third book saw the light of day, the Armenians were still mortified by the harrowing and continuing trauma of 1915. No new aspects of his talent shimmered in his fourth and fifth volumes. The aforementioned poets struck a chord with their readers, who basked in optimism. Tēkēean's second book, arguably his best collection, appeared in a tense atmosphere on the eve of World War I. Perhaps his technique had something to do with it, too. Most of his verse lacks internal rhyme and abounds with enjambment and grammatical inversion, often requiring a second reading to fathom the depth of his contemplation. Ironically, he was a painstaking perfectionist when it came to form and precision of words, meter, and rhyme and invariably revised (often repeatedly and over long periods of time) the initial forms of his inspiration. Yakob Ōšakan (q.v.) proclaimed him to be the most original poet of the Armenian Dispersion.



He was off to a rough start with his first collection, which brought to light his youthful dreamy anxieties and aspirations. But his second and third (*Hrašali yarutiwn*, Wonderful rebirth; *Kēsgišerēn minchew aršaloys*, From midnight to dawn), firmly established him as a first-rate poet. The identity of the object of his affections, which deeply agitated his heart and mind, remained mysteriously ambiguous. Unrequited and privately cherished love, haunting memories, unattainable dreams such as fathering a son, and terrible blows of fate, all gnawing at his heart, are major themes in the latter two volumes. More or less the same topics, expressed in an uneven voice, make up the next book, *Sēr* (Love). Patriotic sentiments and Armenia predominate his penultimate collection, titled *Hayergutiwn* (Songs on, or a celebration of, Armenia and the Armenians), which brings together numerous poems culled from his earlier work, those interspersed in the periodical press, and a considerable number of new ones. *Talaran* (Songbook) contained the poems, mostly sonnets, he wrote in the twilight of his life (he is often referred to as the Armenian Prince of Sonnets).

In his patriotic lyrical verses, many of which were inspired by his two visits to Armenia, Tēkēean sought the spirit of his nation, rather than its splendor, and echoed its aspirations, old and new (e.g., “Zuartnots tačarin mēj” = At the Zvartnots Cathedral). He was one of the few intellectuals fortuitously to escape 1915, because he happened to be in Jerusalem on the night of April 24 when the Armenian intellectuals were rounded up. The destruction of the Western Armenians remained a bleeding wound to the end of his life and gave rise to a number of commemorative, tryingly painful, indignant but dignified poems (e.g., “K’san kaḥaḥanner” = in memory of the twenty members of the Hnchakean Party sent to the gallows in June of 1915; “Suetia”; “Eprat” = Euphrates; “Ahawor ban mē . . .” = Something terrible . . .; “Erb ōrē gay verjapēs = When the day finally comes; “Garnan gišer” = A spring night; “Ov Hayastan” = O, Armenia; “Piti ēsenk’ Astutzoy” = We shall say to God; etc.).

Tēkēean’s poetry was on the whole cerebral, austere yet poignant, subtle and elegiac, distressful yet lyrical and dignified. There was something of the stoic in him; personal love remained elusive, and only dreams and hopeful anticipation of reciprocal affection periodically illuminated his otherwise sad life. His mental and artistic steadfastness was remarkable. His attractive verse was expressed in an elegant and meticulous Armenian, with a voice all its own.

**MATTĒOS ZARIFEAN** (1894–1924) published two collections of poetry in his lifetime. The Beirut edition of his collected works, edited jointly by Siran Seza (sister of Zarifean) and Vahē-Vahean (q.v.), contains



the turn of the twentieth century, the latter in the form of a diary narrates the temptations and tribulations of a celibate priest as the principal of an orphanage sheltering children who have survived the Armenian massacres of the mid-1890s. Here, as well as in some of his other short stories, his prose is economical and immediate, warm and subtly melancholic. Yakob Ōšakan, in his *Hamapatker*, noted the influence on *Herosē* and *Vankē* respectively, of Maupassant's *Boule-de-suif* and L. Andreev's *Krasny smekh* (The red laugh), both of which Chēōkiwrean translated into Armenian.

ERUAND ŌTEAN (1869–1926) was a prolific and popular satirist, novelist, and editor-publicist, with a considerable amount of writing scattered in the periodical press. His celebrated predecessor, Yakob Paronean, had just died when Ōtean started his literary career in the early 1890s. Ōtean stood on Paronean's shoulders, but their styles and scopes were dissimilar in many respects. Paronean's spontaneous wit sparkled brightly, and his sweeping satire was annihilating; Ōtean's satire was distinguished by subtlety. The former roared with laughter, often through tears, and was embittered when his whiplash words failed to bring people to their senses; the latter smiled, frequently provoked a good laughter, and lacked his elder colleague's reformist tendencies. Paronean focused almost exclusively on the Armenian community in Constantinople; Ōtean's purview, by virtue of his nomadic life, encompassed wider geographical areas and a greater variety of characters. Paronean concentrated on humor and satire alone, while Ōtean also wrote novels and short stories. As contributors to and editor-publishers of periodicals (almost a mania for Ōtean), they both wasted a good deal of their time and talent on topical issues, and had neither the time nor desire, it seems, to revise their writings.

His novels dealing with social themes depict Armenian realities in Constantinople and frequently have merchants as their protagonists. *Ėntanik, patiw, baroyakan* (Family, honor, morality), *Talakani knikē* (Wife of the parish council's chairman), *Mijnord tēr papan* (The match-maker priest), are some of his better known works. The first is the story of an immoral man, hiding behind the values making up the title of the novel, who wants those words for his epitaph after Sister Atropos has cut off the thread of his life. In the second book a termagant, Saŋen, wife of the wealthy Margar, feels terribly insulted when the wife of the chairman of the parish council is offered a chair at church while she is disregarded. She runs off to her husband, plots her revenge for this outrage, and the chairman is eventually forced to resign. The third novel shows the unscrupulous ends to which a priest goes to make money



through matchmaking. Ōtean has raised more or less similar concerns in numerous well-knit and rapidly moving short novels and stories (e.g., "Vačarakani mē namaknerē kam katareal mard ēllalu aruestē" = The letters of a merchant, or the art of being a perfect [i.e., successful] person).

Ōtean wrote some of the earliest detective stories. The novel *Aptiwl Hamit ew Šerlok Holms* (Abdulhamid and Sherlock Holmes), which he categorized as a contemporary historical novel, has as its sequel *Saliha hanēm kam banakē bīnaworin dēm* (Miss Saliha or the army against the tyrant), a novel of "Ottoman revolutionary life." Action, suspense, and all the other usual elements and devices are used by Ōtean to highlight multinational political opposition to sultan Abdulhamid II. In *Matnichē* (The traitor), yet another *roman feuilleton*, a handful of Armenians are seen pursuing similar aspirations. Mention should also be made of *T'iw 17 haḡiēn* (Spy number seventeen), despite the fact that it is not a purely detective story. The backdrop is the Young Turk regime, World War I, and the wholesale slaughter of the Armenians in 1915–16.

Most critics regard Ōtean's "socialist" tri-part novel as his masterpiece or at least as one of his best works, made up of *Aṛakelutiwn mē i Tzaplvar* (A mission to Tzaplvar), *Ėnker Panjuni Vaspurakani mēj* (Comrade Panchuni in Vaspurakan), and *Ėnker Panjuni taragrutean mēj* (Comrade Panchuni in exile). There is much room under this umbrella for some other works, such as some of his short novels and novels (e.g., *Es drsetsi chem aṛner* = I shall not marry an outsider, a central theme of which is the contempt in which the provincial Armenians were held by the "indigenous" Armenians of Constantinople, a deep-seated and multifaceted attitude with a long history) and *Yetaṛoḡuḡean makaboytznerē* (Parasites of the revolution). Ōtean, as a witness to the rise and activities of the Armenian political parties and as one who intimately knew many of their leaders and followers, derided, in his tri-part novel referred to above, the extreme expressions of formalism and mechanical approach to political theory. Described here are the activities, actually the ravages, of Panjuni (pronounced Panchuni in Western Armenian, a kind of malapropism for Armenian *ban* [pronounced *pan*] *chuni* = brainless), a Marxist propagandist who audited social sciences at Geneva, returns to Constantinople and, finding the field crowded, sets himself the destructive task of mobilizing the Armenian proletariat against the bourgeoisie and capitalists, none of which truly existed in the Armenian provinces, especially the rural areas. There is neither passion nor bitterness nor alarm to Ōtean's narrative, which exposes the absurd activities of his bizarre character through caricature. In this and in a number of other respects, it bears some resemblance to *Don Quixote*, though it lacks such depth and



tragicomic elements. Also, unlike the Knight of the Lions, one feels no degree of sympathy for Panjuni; yet one does not detest him either. He is pernicious because he is thoughtless. As Ōtean parodies the confusion of socialist terminology with theory, its broader misinterpretation and misapplication, hyperbole puts certain parts of the novel beyond the realm of the real and fosters in the reader a benevolent intolerance for anything leading to such absurdities.

*Yelapohurean makaboytzerē* (Parasites of the revolution) strings together brilliant satirical portraits of a number of charlatans who pose as revolutionaries to benefit from the respect and hospitality accorded to such activists by the public. *Mer erespoḥannerē* (Our deputies) is a collection of profiles of some of the deputies to the Armenian National Assembly. With humor and sarcasm and some help from Paronean, Ōtean has handed down to posterity an amusing and incisive commentary on the intelligentsia and Armenian realities of the period. *Tasnerku tari Polisēn durs* (Twelve years spent away from Constantinople, i.e., 1896–1908) is an intimate, spirited, and humorous account covering half a dozen years or so of Ōtean's peregrination in Europe and Egypt, his encounters with Armenian intellectuals (most of whom, like the author himself, had fled the Armenian massacres of the mid-1890s), and interesting anecdotes, episodes, and events. As usual, Ōtean writes in excellent Armenian, with a light, delicate touch and a broad smile ("the divine laughter" as he put it "free from grudges and hatred"), entertaining no illusions about the power of satire and humor to transform human life.

**ZAPĒL ASATUR** (1863–1934) emerged in the 1890s as the leading woman writer at a time when Srбуhi Tiwsab (q.v.) maintained long years of silence to her death in 1901. Asatur wrote both verse and prose (*noravēps*, short narratives and a novel), the bulk and best of which was published by the early 1900s. She launched her career with her only novel, *Aṭjkan mē sirtē* (The heart of a girl), which was well received. This is the story of a girl who acts on the prompting of her heart, but is abandoned and wastes away in desolate grief. Asatur's short stories highlight mothers and motherhood, the temptations women find themselves exposed to, their vanity, and what women expect from men—namely love, attention, and dedication. Although her craftsmanship was less distinguished than some of her celebrated contemporaries, Asatur's prose bears witness to the mores and mentality of the times.

Asatur's early poems were overburdened by a heavy dose of Classical Armenian, which she discarded over a relatively short period of time. A considerable part of her verse is made up of narrative poems



and concentrates on the sadder aspects of women's lives and on nature. Contemplative and retrospective elements of a general nature come to govern her vague poetic energies a little later in her life. A romantic to the marrow of her bones, Asatur paid meticulous attention to form and diction. And it is in this realm that she made her modest contribution to Armenian verse, in some measure anticipating the accomplishments of the greater talents who were about to burst onto the literary scene.

INTRA's (i.e., Indra, 1875–1921) two volumes, one in prose and the other in verse, stood outside the mainstream of literature of the day. Their appearance generated a good deal of controversy and still await a credible interpretation, especially of the sources that inspired them. The first collection, *Nerašharh* (Inner world, i.e., Inner self), is a prose narrative in which the author speaks in first person of impressions, ideas, symbols, states of mind, and of spiritual, mystical, and metaphysical sensibilities. In an attempt to escape the real world by defining his relationship to society, nature, love, and the "eternal," he longs for the "light" and the "infinite." Beside excellent passages there are some nonsensical ones. His ability to articulate abstract ideas is remarkable. His Armenian, employed with unusual flexibility, is replete with calques, new compounds and syntactical patterns, reinterpretation of words, colorful images, and intricate metaphors. There is a certain degree of lyricism to his style, but it is often circuitous, repetitive, and tortuous. Both Theosophy and Gongorism, along with a score of other movements, have been suggested as possible sources of influence. Certain trends of Theosophy (Mme Blavatsky's version) seem to be plausible. As for the latter, though unlikely, it may partly explain some aspects of his book, particularly the intricate metaphors, vivid images, and strangeness of language.

His *Nočastan* (A cypress grove) is a collection of verse (sonnets) spoken in Intra's distinct voice. They have been composed in an intellectual vein and lack warmth and immediacy. Rhyme and meter seem to have restricted the flight of his imagination. Still, his very own senses and sensibilities, his fine receptiveness for sound and shades of color, images, and his unmistakable identity set this not-so-popular volume apart from the verse of his contemporaries.

**ZAPEL ESAYAN** (1878–1943) holds an illustrious place in the front rank of modern Armenian prose. She attained fame early, and her attractive literature generated much critical interpretation. She contributed to the periodical press, too, though it is not only her writings that kept her in the limelight; she was also very active in public life. She championed the cause of women's emancipation in numerous articles, pressing for a



radical and comprehensive re-evaluation of women's standing in society and conjugal life. Of similar central importance for Esayan were a number of social-cultural issues and the destiny of her people.

The sophisticated exploration of the human spirit in general, and that of women in particular, is a favorite domain of Esayan's, and the most charming, original, and enduring aspect of her short novels and stories. Introspection (but not introversion); fulfillment through self-expression, literature, and the arts; and communion with others and mother nature, all against a background of the human condition, are some of the elements that inspired adulation of her work. Esayan's ebullient journeys into the human psyche, needs, and aspirations are expressed in a simple but elegant, trim and trenchant, style aglow with warmth. Her short pieces that appeared in the first decade of the twentieth century consolidated her growing fame and attested to the wide embrace of her shimmering talent. *Spasman srahin mēj* (In the waiting room) analyzes the sad plight of a young mother; *Skiwtari verjaloyserē* (Scutari twilights) is a delightful description of nature intertwined with some literary and aesthetic concerns; *Hlunerē ew ēmbostnerē* (Conformists and dissidents) deals with some socio-political issues under Abdulhamid II's oppressive rule; *Šnorhkov mardik* (Decent people) exposes the degenerate Armenian bourgeoisie; and *Keltz hančarner* (Phoney [i.e., unrealized] geniuses) castigates, though with regret, ignorance in some circles of Armenian society and the slothful arrogance of some Armenian writers, principally the precocious Intra (q.v.).

There followed *Aweraknerun mēj* (Amid the ruins), a soulful record of the aftermath of the 1909 massacres of the Armenians in Adana and neighboring towns. Esayan toured the area on a relief mission, observed the devastation, and met with survivors. The motives for the calamity were beyond her scope, and her account is free of political or racial-religious commentary. Beside slain and charred bodies, houses, and churches, Esayan's testimony with dramatic sensitivity articulated the anguish of those who witnessed the carnage, mainly women and elderly people. Many of the victims had come from the Armenian provinces in the East. Having fled the Armenian massacres of the mid-1890s, some of them had settled in the region, and some had come in search of temporary or seasonal employment. Although Esayan portrays a number of defiant Turks, the unavoidability of self-defense dawns upon some of those who had been taken by surprise or had shunned the idea of resistance before the carnage. But perhaps Esayan's greatest triumph was her optimism, generated by her people's wonderful resilience, with which she illuminates her disquieting narrative.



pieces, both large and small. His non-literary volumes are important but beyond the scope of this brief survey. What clinched him a spot in the history of Armenian letters was his small collection of short stories, titled *Ayn sew ōrerun* (During those dark days). Antonean was among the Armenian intellectuals deported in 1915. He fortuitously escaped certain death and recorded a number of episodes he had witnessed on the trek of deportation and death across the Syrian desert. Narrated in a direct and simple style, the stories capture in an unembellished fashion some chilling instances of man-made tragedy.

**YAKOB ŌŠAKAN** (1883–1948) is a celebrated novelist and a key figure to understanding both modern Western Armenian literature and that of the Dispersion. No serious study of the former can be undertaken without his extensive literary survey, *Hamapatker arewmtahay grakanurean* (A panorama of Western Armenian literature). His own novels, some of which rank among the best, added a new dimension to Armenian prose and signified a principal, albeit inimitable, trend in the literature of the Dispersion. Aspiring after originality, he, together with Kostan Zaryan (q.v.) and Gelam Barselean (1883–1915), founded the short-lived literary periodical *Mehean*, devoted to innovative approaches to Armenian literature. The bloodbath of 1915 claimed Barselean's life and radically altered the outlook of those very few writers who fortuitously escaped it. Ōšakan and Zarean were among the survivors. But these erstwhile colleagues of like mind in quest of innovation pursued their literary experiments in very different ways.

*Honarhnerē* (The humble), Ōšakan's first collection of short stories, depicts marginal characters from his native village in the vicinity of Iznik (the Nicaea of olden times). In a limpid and trenchant style and with soulful sympathy, Ōšakan probes the psychological depths of his protagonists, almost all of whose passionate yearnings remain unfulfilled. They eventually lose their sanity, soul, or life to unrequited love and passion. It was in this collection that one of Ōšakan's fundamental tenets took a clear-cut shape: that the libido was the most potent driving force behind human behavior. Despite the fact that the reader can easily discern the effects of poverty, ignorance, and traditions, such social issues were in themselves of no concern at all to the author, who maintained that the sole domain of literature was the human soul.

A thematic kinship, indeed oneness, marks his novels wherein there emerges in varying shades one other cardinal element central to Ōšakan's creed: "blood," by which he meant heredity, atavistic patterns, customs, myths and traditions, and overall racial characteristics. As he once put it



in his self-portrait, for him the elements of true art are derived from blood. This concept informs his analysis of human behavior, including that of the perpetrators of the genocide. Not surprisingly, the massive butchery of his nation haunted him throughout his life (on several occasions he had escaped death by the skin of his teeth). Before his very eyes, the pre-1915 intellectual substratum had been destroyed, and its architects, the glories of Western Armenian literature, most of whom Ōšakan knew intimately, had been slaughtered in cold blood. A lifestyle, a culture, and its monuments had perished and a homeland lost. His people were decimated and dispersed. And the Dispersion that arose offered him but cold comfort. Ōšakan had always felt that the response of Armenian writers to the massacres of the mid-1890s, those of Adana, and the inferno of 1915 had been, with few exceptions, inadequate. Now a new generation of writers, many of whom were orphaned by the calamity, turned inward, rejected old Armenian ways and values, and tried, albeit unsuccessfully, to circumvent the genocide. Ōšakan believed that he had to help Armenians and non-Armenians understand this crime against humanity—lest it strike mankind again—especially in view of the apathy of the West and Turkish denials of this wholesale slaughter, in which, he averred, the Turkish masses had actively and extensively taken part. The key to understanding this man-made tragedy, Ōšakan held, lay in the Turkish psyche. Overwhelmed by the enormity of the loss and consumed with wrath, he delved into the Turkish soul in search of the roots of the terrible evil, as he put it, that gripped it during and after the massacres of the mid-1890s. He did so with unforgiving passion.

*Siwlēyman Ēfēnti* (Süleyman Efendi), perhaps the least successful of his novels, is an attempt to project his image of the Turk. The protagonist, a man of unspeakable cruelty, utter corruption, and base instincts, rises rapidly to eminence, power, and wealth. His son, totally unlike his ghoulish father, is a decent young man (taking after his mother, who came from a fine urban family) with enlightened political views. He disowns and kills his father and is sentenced to 101 years in prison. *Hači Aptullah* (Haji Abdullah), a far better work, is the sad and lurid story of Abdullah, who has two wives: one of whom bears him five children that all die in infancy. Misled and inspired by his superstitious and fanatical father-in-law, Abdullah commits ghastly murders. He too, is sentenced to 101 years in prison. In the same gaol, the reader meets Haji Murad, the Armenian protagonist of *Hači Murat*, a lone wolf unjustly wanted for murder. Recruited by Armenian revolutionaries, Murad is eventually disillusioned with them. He falls for a Circassian woman and is dragged to prison straight from her bed. *Tzak ptukē* (The incontinent woman; the



moral-traditional context of this idiomatic phrase is not possible to capture in a single English word) is arguably Ōşakan's best novel. There is much more to it than just the dramatic life and demise of a lascivious young woman. In this novel, as well as in *Hači Murat* and some earlier works, including *Kayserakan yaltrerguriwn* (Imperial exultation; a series of five abstract and rather dull stories), Ōşakan outlined certain trends, factors, and metamorphoses in Turkish mentality on the eve of World War I, all of which were to have been amplified in his grand novel, *Mnatsordats* (acclaimed by almost all observers as his chef-d'oeuvre), which remained incomplete.

*Mnatsordats* is the classical, genitive-dative plural form of *mnats-ordk* (i.e., remnants, relics, fragments and, hence, *Paralipomena*), and the Armenian appellation (as in the Greek version, 1 and 2 *Paralipomenon*) of the two books of Chronicles. But Ōşakan, despite some very obvious parallels (e.g., destruction and exile), makes no reference to the books of Chronicles and simply uses the word in the nominative, in the sense of "remnants," "fragments" or "relics." The reader is left to surmise on the basis of the extant version and Ōşakan's comments on the unwritten parts of the plot that what he principally had in mind was not so much the survivors, as the collective self of those who perished in 1915. He wished to perpetuate as many traits of this identity as he could, in a manner creatively adapted from Proust. The period he planned to cover stretched from about the 1850s to 1915, but the published text brings the story of some Armenian peasants and urban Turks up to the early 1900s, well within Abdulhamid II's reign. The third, *inachevé*, volume, was to deal with the crime in Bursa and Çankırı, the final destination of some of the luminous intellectuals rounded up on the night of 24 April 1915, concluding the narrative in the Syrian desert.

The novel juxtaposes the Armenian mentality and Turkish psyche and illustrates the corrupting effects of the latter on the former, according to Ōşakan's lights. It shows, at a certain locale near Bursa, the transformations in Armenian character under oppression and terror. As in the Armenian, so in the Turkish case: Ōşakan resorts to psychological analysis to probe the metamorphoses in the Turkish soul, tracing its genetic characteristics, social and political structures, music and architecture, and the rise of atavistic patterns among German-educated leaders (Ōşakan firmly believed in German complicity in the genocide), which, he averred, also seized the Turkish masses and gave rise to a pervasive state of mind that conceived and carried out the genocide. There is little action in the novel, but its intriguing plot, penetrating analyses, and the torrential flow of Ōşakan's narrative make for gripping reading. Such, however, may not



be the case for readers (of Ōšakan's prose in general) unfamiliar with his style, which has been severely criticized for its unconventional patterns and studied complexity. In fact, unusual syntax, ellipsis, inversion, periphrasis, and parallelisms are common, as are exceedingly short nominal sentences, tortuously long sentences, vague interrogative phrases, new semantic nuances, and unorthodox punctuation. He argued convincingly that his sophisticated style was unstudied and urged the first-time reader to be patient. In addition, Ōšakan's dissection of human behavior from his own perspective has not been popular with some readers. As more and more of his works are made available to the public, there is a growing recognition of his experiments, his contribution to the genre, and of his novel as one of the remarkable accomplishments in twentieth-century Armenian literature. Although Ōšakan named three contemporary Armenian writers (cf. his *Hamapatker*, vol. 10, 133–34) and certain factors to explain his failure to complete the novel, one should look elsewhere for such mitigating circumstances. In all likelihood, what clipped his wings and crippled his mental stamina was of a technical, structural, and emotional nature.

The Armenian theater had forged a remarkable tradition by the time Ōšakan appeared on the literary stage. Nonetheless, he found the accomplishments of playwrights, including those of the most celebrated, Širvanzade and Šant' (q.q.v.), to be unsatisfactory, particularly in content. According to him, the former resorted to cheap effects and vulgar realism; the latter paid excessive attention to form, and his plays were removed from life and rather cinematic. (From what one can glean from sporadic comments, Ōšakan had no taste for the cinema.) The plays he fashioned were to expose the inner recesses of the human soul and to imitate human life in a genuine fashion. Although he never said as much, they also partly illustrated his criticism of his colleagues. He wrote a number of plays and many a *knarahat*, (literally, a "lyrical play"), which, he once said, were meant to be read and staged. They are interesting and mostly enjoyable to read as the expression of a different and creditable experiment. But they all suffer from technical flaws that call into question their suitability for stage and their power to convince. Ōšakan relied on the utterances of his characters to unveil human drama, conflicts of base instincts, sexual drive, etc.; yet styling effective dialogues was not one of his foremost strengths. In some cases his characters lack credibility, and intensity withers in protracted, repetitious conversations. One of his best "lyrical" plays remains *Stepannos Siwnetsi*, a most attractive *knarahat* in verse, based on the life of Stepanos Siwnetsi (d. 735), metropolitan of Siwnik, who was killed by a harlot and whose life is related by



a number of historians (Movsēs Kalankatuatsi or Dashurantsi, Kirakos Gandzaketsi, Mhitar Ayrivanetsi, and Stepanos Ōrbelean.) Having been shunned, privately as well as in public, by the metropolitan, Ōšakan's Princess of Siwnik (replacing the historical harlot) commits a crime of passion. Three plays of Ōšakan's were published in 1990: *Norpsakē* (The new wedding) deals with love and loving in wedlock; *Knkahayrē* (The godfather) is the story of a wealthy old man who "charitably" unites a couple in matrimony, only to use the bride as his mistress and the husband for public appearances; and *Akloramartē* (The cockfight) illustrates love and patriotism and juxtaposes, in the catastrophic days of World War I, those who sink deep into the mire of utter corruption and dishonor to save their skin with those who face death with courage and dignity.

Ōšakan attached no importance to literary criticism, regarding it as an ephemeral effort with no appreciable impact on literature (he once called it a "parasitic genre"). Yet with his critical thought molded by Sainte-Beuve, Taine, Jules Lemaître, and Remy de Gourmont, among others, he wrote a monumental panorama of Western Armenian literature, which has since become an indispensable tool for its history, from its birth in the 1840s to its extinction in the wake of its man-made eclipse in 1915. It is a gallery of some fifty portraits drawn against a background of the period, with unique insights into the person, life, and work of the authors. Such sharp perception Ōšakan owed not only to his bright intellect, keen memory, and erudition, but also to his active participation in Western Armenian literary-cultural life in the early twentieth century and to his personal acquaintance with most of the illustrious and the not-so-illustrious writers of the period. Given his propinquity to them, Ōšakan took pains to maintain exacting standards of objectivity—one of the main merits of this work. Vastly improving the tradition initiated by Aršak Chōpanean and Artasēs Yarutiwnean (q.q.v.), Ōšakan developed his highly personal approach to literary history and criticism. He recreated the era as seen through his own eyes, and he forged the complex environment that nourished its own literature, bringing to life multitudes of characters and colors, texts and tools, ideas and idiosyncrasies, impressions and impulses, and national moods and spirits. The work certainly took the pulse of Armenian intellectual life and, together with elements of inquiry and judgment (such as analysis, comparison, craftsmanship, simplicity, sincerity, and depth), and what he considered national ethnic features, has been an interesting and unique touchstone by which to judge the accomplishments of Western Armenian authors. Still, many have disagreed and will undoubtedly continue to disagree with some of his principles and pronouncements, though never without help from Ōšakan himself. His



sweeping, if audacious and candid, generalizations and criticism are at times parochial, contradictory or naive. But the chief reason for discord lay in Ōšakan's definition of literature and his principles of critique. And when it came to that, both he and his opponents took intolerant and intransigent stances. An extra element of contention and recrimination was Ōšakan's almost total failure to appreciate Eastern Armenian verse, whether pre-Soviet or Soviet. In truth, Ōšakan was similarly censorious towards Western Armenian poets, but in the final analysis, he did indeed have a bias in favor of Western Armenian poetry and criticism. If one looked at the larger picture, such polarity ultimately reflected the cleavage between the Eastern and Western Armenian mentality and outlook.

**YAKOB MNDZURI** (1886–1978) was already a septuagenarian when his first collection of short stories and prose pieces appeared in 1958. He has since been ranked among the chief masters who have chosen the Armenian countryside as the setting for their literature. A fine tradition had been gradually shaped in the works of H̄rimean, Sruandzteants, Tlkatintsi, R̄. Zardarean, Hamastel (q.q.v.), and many others. What Mndzuri revealed to his readers was a new and enchanting tiny universe that had all but vanished in 1915. To age thirteen, Mndzuri had lived in his native village of Armtan (Armudan, Turkey). He then spent nine years in Constantinople and returned to his birthplace in 1907. He taught in the winter and worked in the fields the remainder of the year. In 1914 he left his wife and four children behind for medical treatment in Istanbul. As World War I broke out within a short period of his departure, he was unable to return home. In the meantime, his entire family perished in 1915. Mndzuri settled in Istanbul, remarried, and took odd jobs to earn a living. And he set forth quietly on a long, nostalgic journey to his native village and its vicinity in the years 1890–1914, recreating its era and aura in short stories and in short descriptive pieces.

Mndzuri must have led a double life; his mind fled his body, an exile resident of Istanbul, a kind of *pied à terre*, for total immersion in the routine of his native village. The chronological and geographical distances that stood between him and his cherished home were reduced to almost nil. His image of his birthplace is one large, detailed, and variegated picture, where people, places, nature, and animals are painted as an organic whole. But even to the naked eye, certain details of the larger canvas look fuzzy. In many a piece, Mndzuri left the denouement (actually, "conclusion" would be a more appropriate word) unresolved; they come to an abrupt and uncertain end. This helps explain one cardinal facet of his literary postulate. He was interested in recalling real life, as



correlation in mood between Hovhannisyan and the Russian poet Semyon Nadson (1862–87). Hovhannisyan's diction is purer and more flexible than that of his predecessors, and contains elements of vivid popular expressions and idioms thrown into some of his better known songs. Hovhannisyan also distinguished himself by his sensitivity to form—an early experiment that was built upon by subsequent masters.

**ALEK'SANDR TZATUREAN**'s (1865–1917) work has affinities with both his generation of writers and the work of his junior contemporaries, who were soon to emerge as the pre-eminent poets of the age. Love, nature, the countryside, emigrants, patriotism, the plight of the unfortunate and the working class, and his championing of the truth and the beautiful inspired his imagination. His imagery is ordinary and his work, popular at the time, lacks an overall strong note of authenticity, but his winsome sincerity and lively style add charm to some of his poems, of which half a dozen or so have been put to music and gained popularity, as have his humorous-satirical poems. He seems to be the only author to have written a series of marine poems (notably the cycle "Łrimi albomits, 1896–1898," i.e., *From the Crimean album, 1896–1898*), which, it is tempting to note (however unfair the comparison may be) have been overshadowed by the marine paintings of his senior contemporary and fellow countryman, I. K. Ayvazovski (1817–1900).

**YOVHANNĒS TUMANEAN** (1869–1923) is one of the most popular writers of the twentieth century. His poems, epic and lyric, his short stories, tales, and folk tales are all drawn from the soil of Armenia, especially the region of Lori, where he spent his childhood feasting his eyes on its pristine nature and listening to haunting tales and the fury of the elements dinning in his ears. His Armenian is a luminous, unadorned idiom, felicitous and dynamic in flow. There is an Olympian calm to his tone, particularly in his contemplative stanzas, and bare drama in his longer poems of epic nature. The unobtrusive presence of the elegiac is always felt, and a mourning mood pervades some of his monodies and his "Hogehangist" (Requiem) inspired by the grief of his nation. But overall, an unflinching optimism subtly illuminates his whole work, written with unstudied charm. Tumanian was initially under the spell of R. Patkanean and Ł. Ališan, but later felt closer affinities with H. Hovhannisyan and A. Tzaturean (q.q.v.). He considered Shakespeare and Pushkin the greatest masters, and he certainly owed the latter something for the craftsmanship in which he fashioned his delightful, homespun tradition.

A serious social concern provides the context for some of his best narrative poems: the devastating consequences of superstition, ignorance,



and long-standing customs. "Maron," "Lořetsi Sak'on," and *Anuř* (or *Anoyř*) eloquently illustrate this point. Unable to tolerate her forced marriage, Marō sets herself free, but is cruelly shunned and snubbed by friend and foe alike, driving her to utter desperation. Despite skepticism on the part of some critics, "Lořetsi Sak'on" is a convincing and poignant psychological probe into the anguished soul of an ignorant, superstitious Sakō, whose imagination magnifies and multiplies imaginary beings, sounds, and threats that drive him insane. *Anuř*, the most popular opera (put to music by Armen Tigranyan, 1879–1950), is considered Tumanean's masterpiece by most critics. Until the breakup of the Soviet Union, the Armenian national opera house inaugurated and concluded its annual season performing *Anuř*.

*Anuř* has a simple plot. Sarō and Mosi are friends, and Anuř, sister of Mosi, and Sarō are in love. Catching Mosi off guard at a traditional wrestling match, Sarō topples him to the ground with the rashness of an unreasoning lover. Mosi hunts down and shoots Sarō dead, avenging his public humiliation; Anuř goes out of her mind. Surprisingly, some have construed the poem (and a number of other works dealing with similar themes) as a nostalgic elegy for yesteryear. If there is any nostalgia here on the part of Tumanean, it is for noble love and the moral purity that characterized the peasantry. In all other respects, it is a total negation of outdated and disastrous notions of honor and tradition. In *Anuř*, as in other works revolving around similar subjects, Tumanean's characters are entrapped by convention; they have no life of their own beyond the long-standing code of behavior, and are thus victims of ineluctable fate. Any act of defiance entails a deadly or tragic punishment. This has been seen as a manifestation of Tumanean's realism, which assumes even greater sophistication when it documents the ravages of money and industrialization in this essentially backward and conservative society.

Tumanean congenially tapped the wellhead of Armenian folklore, especially folk tales, legends, and popular accounts. His adaptations are as vivid and varied in approach as the original material. In some cases he made only minor changes, leaving the plot untouched; in other instances he made major modifications, and on a number of occasions he blended his stories into a synthesis of varying details. Dawit in "Sasuntsi Dawit" is a composite character, with details of his portrait taken from the various recensions available to Tumanean. The poem, left incomplete, recreates the third cycle of the Armenian national epic and illustrates what Tumanean thought were the essential aspects of Dawit's character: a relentless struggle against invaders and despots, and the promotion of peace and friendship.



The "wandering" *ašut*'s account recorded in E. Lalayants's ethnographic collection, *Jawahki burmunk*, is the subject of *Tmkaberdi arumě* (The capture of Tmkabert), a poetic hymn to love and prowess, and the sad story of a woman's fickleness. The evil aspects of human nature and the power of love found expression in "Ahtamar," an Armenian echo of *Hero and Leander*. A traditional account of faith and patriotism, and perhaps an allegorical commentary on Armenian resilience, is the essence of "Aławnu vankě" (The dove monastery). "Parvana" (i.e., *parvāneh* = moth) illustrates the elusive nature of happiness and how lofty aspirations often remain unattainable. "Mi katil mełr" (A drop of honey), taken from *Ahuēsagirk* (a medieval collection of fables), mocks the stupid aspects of human behavior, petty parti-pris, rash action, and mob mentality. Tumanian wrote a few yarns and adaptations of some twenty Armenian fairy tales and translated nearly as many into Armenian, mainly from German.

The mysteries of the universe and life claimed a good deal of Tumanian's thoughts. His long poem "Dēpi anhuně" (Journey to infinity) and his quatrains, close to seventy in number, explore such concepts in relation to time and space, revealing something of the cosmic pantheist in him. To him, the soul was immortal; it merged in eternal union with the only immutable constant—time—just like the wavelets of a tributary river with the ocean. The vanity of life, the joy of giving, altruism and lofty human values, and "the biography of his soul" are vividly framed in his philosophical quatrains, in effortless and rhythmic lines. Not surprisingly, the elegiac mood in his patriotic verse ("Hayots leñnerum," "Mer uhtě," "Hayots viště," "Hayrenik'is het," etc.) is free from chauvinism or extreme partisanship, and though at times overwhelmed by grief, racial and racist distinctions are inundated by his opulent spirit.

Of his short stories, "Erkatulu šinutiwně" (The construction of the railway) laments the negative consequences the train carried in its train into rural areas, spoiling nature, polluting the air (and driving the deer away), and precipitating industrialization, thus drastically changing the moral and social fabric of society. "Nesoyi k'arabałnisě" (Neso's steam bath) is the sad story of victims of ignorance. In "Im ěnker Neson" (My friend, Neso), cruel social conditions transform Neso from a kind soul into a villain. And "Gik'or," wherein the boy of the title is uprooted from his native village only to wither away in the big city, is an exquisite accomplishment, the crown of his short stories.

**AVETIK' ISAHAKYAN's** (1875–1957) first poems and verse collection, *Erger u vērker* (Songs and wounds), were greeted with acclaim, as were



his subsequent collections. If Lori was Tumanean's source of inspiration, then Širak, with its landscape and lifestyle, was Isahakyan's. Even though Tumanean, the brightest star of his generation, had only just made his promising appearance, heralding the arrival of a new generation, Āpa'yēl Patkanean and particularly Hovhannes Hovhannisyan (q.q.v.) were still the dominant poets. There were some innovative qualities to Isahakyan's literary effort in both form and content, instantly acknowledged by the public and recognized by the historians of Armenian literature. A far more emotional, fiery, and transparent lyricism than that found in H. Hovhannisyan's verse distinguished Isahakyan's poetic profile. He sang of love, often juxtaposing its ineffable joys with its rejections, sorrows, and deep pain. There was drama and color to his poems, of which a few (a greater number than any of his predecessors) celebrated mothers, motherly love, and devotion—a theme later picked up by Hovhannes Širaz (q.v.). Some of his songs were so sorrowful that they bordered on maudlin sentimentality. He used the spoken dialect of his native region, which was flexible, simple but highly idiomatic, and richly adorned with popular expressions of native provenance, along with many non-native phrases that originated in neighboring Islamic traditions. Thus, aspects of his style and facets of his sensibilities reveal a certain affinity with the art of the Armenian *ašuts*. Isahakyan had an excellent feel for rhyme and rhythm. He frequently used compound adjectives (somewhat akin to the Homeric epithet), incremental repetition, and, particularly, internal rhyme to impressive effect. On some occasions this led to monotony and repetition, but on the whole it introduced musicality to his stoically melancholic poems. This, perhaps, explains why a large number of his poems were put to music.

Isahakyan wrote numerous narrative poems, fables, and legends on a wide variety of topics: love, patriotism, liberty, selfless maternal dedication, and human values and virtues. Such verse was rendered in a lyrical, contemplative mood, employing the literary standard, as in the case of almost all of his non-amatory verse. He also wrote short fiction, a kind of prose poem blended with elements of poetic prose. He was attracted to and recast legends and traditional stories of various countries from Finland to Arabia, from Serbia to Iran, India, and China. One cannot help likening him to a wayfarer with an insatiable appetite, in search of the bright moment, the fleeting second of happiness; for life for him was "the fleeing shadow of a cloud." It is on this premise and a few other philosophical concerns that his long poem, *Abu-Lala-Mahari* (named after the celebrated Arab poet-thinker, Abū al-'alā' al-Ma'arrī, 973–1058), rises.



The poem opens with a brief prologue followed by seven *sūrah*s (so named are the chapters in the *Qur'ān*) and a final *sūrah*. The numeral seven (which has many symbolic values), the camels (symbolizing humility, prudence, but also nymphomania), the palm trees (a symbol of triumph), and the sandy desert, all frequently visible in the poem, do not seem to convey a pronounced symbolic significance. The word *sūrah* (*surah* in the poem) and a number of other Arabic words are interspersed in the text for purposes of characterization. There is no story to narrate; Abu Lala Mahari is seen at night fleeing Baghdad in disgust and baring his soul to the reader in a soliloquy of morbid damnation and vituperation against society. The great Arab poet's profound pessimism, his denunciation of society, women, worldly pleasures, and the unstoppable reign of evil in the world all resonate in the poem. In the harshest terms, Isahakyan also condemns women and dismisses man-made laws, friendship and loyalty, evanescent glory, wealth, power, cities and urban life, the masses, tyrants, and corruption. There is some repetition and verbosity as his breath occasionally falls short of loading to capacity the twenty-syllable lines, which serve his purposes well and help him hammer his message home. Human beings incur Isahakyan's wrath for their failure to grasp and appreciate in practical terms the transience of human life and evanescence of beauty, pursuing instead petty ends and rendering life an insufferable experience for all. Soviet Armenian critics have seen the poem as a reaction to the abortive Russian revolution of 1905. There may be some truth to this, but Isahakyan had also been following European (especially German) philosophy and studying world religions. These obviously suggest alternative or at least complementary sources of influence and inspiration.

**VAHAN TĒREAN's** (1885–1920) distinct poetic voice ranked him among the elite of Armenian writers at the turn of the twentieth century. Both Tumanian and Isahakyan warmly greeted his first collection (the latter had earlier taken him under his wing), which differed so very much from their poetry and ushered in a new approach to verse. Titled *Mṛnšali anurjner* (Twilight or crepuscular reveries), it appeared in 1908 and reappeared in a 1912 volume bringing together his subsequent series, written between the two dates: *Gišer ew yušer* (Night and recollections), *Oski hēkiaṛ* (Golden fairy tale), and *Veradardz* (Return). These collections, containing a good dose of romanticism, established the Symbolist tradition in Armenian verse, traces of which were already perceptible in Isahakyan's work.

Fairy tales were very much a part of Tērean's childhood. The magic fantasy in them, unreal and distant yet palatable and palliative, must have



strongly impressed his mental disposition. During his student years in Moscow (at the Lazarevskii or Lazarean Institut and the university) and St. Petersburg, he avidly and in the original read Baudelaire, Mallarmé, Verlaine, Verhaeren, and the Russian Symbolists: F. Sologub, K. Balmont, V. Ivanov, V. Briusov, and A. Blok. Receptive to impulses from these poets, Tērean's poetic genius invented an *état d'âme*, all autumnal music. His bitterness, he once said, resulted from the incompatibility of his inclinations with the circumstances of life around him. The realm where his fancy and sensibilities fused is a distant one, set mostly in the twilight, where his imagination, transcending objective realities, conjures up misty visions of memories and a mystical experience of love, in rapidly changing moods; a fleeting second of perceived exaltation is instantly submerged in sadness, agony, disillusionment, forlornness, and nostalgia. He felt that the remote and the unreal were peaceful and attractive shelters for his indefinite sensations. He found "eternal liberty" in death, a tranquil realm of reprieve where he would feel relatively free of the burden of his emotions and anguish, which, together with love, he averred, were the only links bonding human beings together. In the poems where Tērean has given himself up completely and blissfully to gloom and pain, some Soviet Armenian critics have seen a miasma of despair and a plunge into decadence.

In the early 1910s, Tērean wrote a number of articles (in particular, "Hay grakanutean galik' ōrē" = The future of Armenian literature, and "Hogewor Hayastan" = Spiritual Armenia, both in 1914) severely criticizing the parochial aspects of Armenian intellectual life, the political parties, and the creation in nineteenth-century Armenian literature of a romantic and material (as opposed to cultural) Armenia. Every aspect of social, political, and cultural life, he held, was geared solely towards the political future of the Western Armenians. It was time the Armenians stopped gazing expectantly at the summit of Mount Ararat and at the ramshackle dome of Ējmiatzin and turned their sights to the revolution brought about by capitalism, the bustling cities, the machine age, and the crumbling of the barriers separating national cultures. It was important that a spiritual Armenia be created, bringing her out of her languorous and debilitating insularity into the mainstream of civilization by shattering the fetters of chauvinism and thoroughly assimilating European civilization. Although somewhat harsh and one-sided, there was much truth to Tērean's observations, which also offer clues to understanding his series titled *Erkir Nairi* (Land of Nairi), the mythical, spiritual homeland, conceived in his heart and projected in his visions as a magnificent apparition.

Echoing Lermontov, who loved the land and people of Russia rather than its glory ("Rodina" = Homeland, 1841), Tērean sang Armenia's



soul and songs, misery and prayers, the sad sound of her tolling bells and the dim light of her huts, not the dazzle of her ancient glory. This, he felt, illustrated how his approach contrasted with backward looking "traditional" patriotism and its symbols of Armenia. He sought through his art to release and ennoble the soul of Armenia, to brighten the prospects of her survival. The land of Nairi, as spiritual Armenia incarnate, and his heart and mind mingle into one entity, simple yet mysterious, drowned in blood yet invincible. What is perhaps more important still, despite the grief, gloom, and the black mist shrouding Nairi, is that an uplifting optimism aesthetically and emotionally informs the poems, most of which were written during World War I, when the Armenians looked death in the eye. (It is interesting to mention here that Tērean had been politically active since his student days. A Social-Democrat, he became a Bolshevik in 1917 and served in the higher echelons of the Soviet government. As the voice of Armenia, he met with Lenin on several occasions, went to Brest-Litovsk with Trotsky, and worked under Stalin at the Nationalities Commissariat.)

There is splendor and captivating mystery to Tērean's lyrical style. Limpid and elegant, it flows melodiously, in pulsating rhythm and rhyme. He employed synesthesia, onomatopoeia, assonance, and alliteration (with an abundance of sibilants) to impressive musical effect and formed new compound words. Although Armenian verse is syllabic, he experimented stress patterns, and introduced forms such as the triolet and ghazel (ghazal).

**AWETIS AHARONEAN's** (1866–1948) literary output consists of short stories, reminiscences, travel notes, plays, some poetry, and ethnographic studies. Among his better works are his short stories and novelettes set in his native province or in other parts of Armenia proper. He received immediate recognition for his initial works such as *Patkerner* (Scenes), in which he depicted refugees fleeing the Armenian massacres of the mid-1890s, and *Azaturean čanaparhin* (On the road to freedom), which became a part of the revolutionary canon, depicting the activities of Armenian revolutionaries. Portrayed in his other short novels and stories are peasants clinging to traditional values in a world where they are treated as second-class subjects. In this gloomy and cruel microcosm, sometimes characterized by massive scenes of destruction, Aharonean's anguished characters, often given to fatalism, almost invariably meet a tragic end. His main preoccupation here lies not so much with the reasons for his heroes' misery as with psychological analyses probing the tortured depth of the human soul.



is captive to her dull, tyrannical husband, Samson. With her husband's unexpected consent and with assistance from her admirer, Armenuhi is able to begin a new life.

*Patui hamar* (For honor; or, A debt of honor) had its premiere in Baku in 1904, and it has been a most popular drama ever since. It sketches conflicting characters in a family, the Ēlizbareans, who are on the verge of disintegration amid the social, economic, and moral disorder afflicting a society, usually defined as bourgeois by Soviet Armenian critics. Margarit, a genuine champion of truth and honesty, pays dearly for her principles in a deadly conflict with her father, Andrēas Ēlizbarean, who has amassed wealth and gained social standing by ruthlessly trampling partners and rivals alike. The characters, victims all of the changing rules of the business of life, drift helplessly to a sad confrontation, some driven by their passion for money and desire to maintain their public reputation, and some (Margarit, Artašēs) by an inbred sense of integrity.

In a way, *Awerakneri vray* (On the ruins) is a sequel to *Patui hamar*. It chronicles the collapse of a family, in this case due to the inability of a traditional merchant-businessman to compete with a new breed of sophisticated capitalists and the nouveaux riches whose enterprises rise on the ruins of the old. *Arhawirki ōrerin* (In the days of terror) takes place near the borders of "Turkish Armenia" and depicts one aspect of the Armenian massacres and deportations: the participation of Armenian volunteers in the initial Russian thrust and withdrawal at the outset of World War I. The play reflects the hopes the Armenians pinned on Russia for deliverance from certain death and concludes with the retreat of the Russians and Armenian refugees. *Morgani ħnamin* (Morgan's in-law) is Širvanzade's only full-length comedy (the other being *Šarlatanē*, The charlatan; or, Humbug, a one-act comedy, 1908), which he wrote after Armenia had become Soviet. It derides wealthy émigrés who fled the Bolshevik Revolution and settled in Paris, but who are still bent on maintaining their corrupt lifestyle by trafficking in cocaine and dreaming about selling off the oil fields and property they left behind to wealthy Americans. The main characters are Petros Mintoyean and his son Žorž (Georges), who is heavily in debt and bamboozles his father into believing that he is about to marry the niece of [J. Pierpont] Morgan. Of great literary and historical significance is Širvanzade's memoirs, *Keanki bovits* (From the crucible of life), a lively and insightful account of people, places, and events.

LEO (1860–1932), a prominent cultural figure with remarkable impact on Armenian intellectual activities, is best known for his history of Armenia, a vibrant account in a most engaging style. He is also known



for his history, documents, and ideology of the Armenian Question; studies of the life and work of outstanding individuals, religious, and intellectual leaders (Mesrop Maštots, Catholicos Yovsēp Arturean, 1743–1801, Stepanos Nazarean, 1812–79, Grigor Artzruni, 1845–92); history of certain schools in Karabagh and Erevan; history of Armenian printing and merchants (hojas), etc.; and many other works still in manuscript form. After Armenia became a Soviet republic (Leo was invited to lecture at the State University of Erevan), he revised some of his views and works. It was a hasty revisionism with unconvincing results.

Leo also engaged in literary activities as an adherent of the school of realism. He wrote some literary criticism; sketched the portraits of some eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Armenian writers; introduced Russian, French, and English authors to Armenian readers; wrote a history of Eastern or Russian Armenian literature from its origins to the 1900s; and formulated his own literary vision in the form of short stories, novels, and plays, almost all of which he wrote at the earlier stages of his career. Armenian rural regions, sad and squalid, impoverished and forlorn, where superstition, ignorance, and old traditional values had a strong hold over peasants, make up the central theme of some of his short works, which are narrated in a lively style. His stories in an urban setting depict innocent victims of the "monstrous" bourgeois system. But a large part of the blame for many a misfortune Leo placed on religious (i.e., Christian) passivity and pacifism, despite the occasional, favorable stance he had for similar traditional values. Artsakh (Karabagh) forms the backdrop, either partially or wholly, to a few of his short stories and his patriotic novel *Meliki atjikē* (The Melik's daughter).

**LEWON MANUĒLEAN** (1864–1919) tried his hand in poetry, plays, and prose. His verse, covering such issues as honesty and the defense of truth, the Armenian massacres, social and other topical concerns, bears the marks of H. Hovhannisyan's influence and now mostly seems rather turbid. Shakespeare was his idol and he wrote drama and "dramatic poems," as he called them, which are thought-provoking and have a greater appeal than his collection of poems. "Tigranuhi," based on Movsēs Horenatsi's account (Tigranuhi, sister of Tigran and wife of Aždahak), illustrates the clash of personal and public interests. In "Galiley ew Milton," a Dominican (i.e., the Inquisition), science, and free thought (Galileo and Milton) confront one another (Manuĕlean must have been aware of Milton's *Areopagitica*). In "Pororik" (Storm), an indomitable poet, Diagoras of Melos, is seen rebelling against the gods. "Sasuntsi Dawir ew Msray Melik" illustrates one episode from the Armenian epic. Similarly,



were calques or simply Russian forms, reflecting their endings and gender. Eastern Armenian was regulated by a number of academic committees.

### **A Survey of Soviet Armenian Literature**

Damned and banned since the mid-thirties, **ELIŠE CHARENTS** (1897–1937) was rehabilitated following Anastas Mikoyan's speech on 11 March 1954, delivered at a meeting in Erevan. Soon thereafter, Soviet Armenian criticism restored him to the foremost position in the Soviet Armenian literary canon. He is often thought of (with Mayakovsky as the leading originator) as one of the principal founders of Soviet verse. His works are now seen as signposts and symbols of his time, and his turbulent life, cut short at forty, as a record of both literary and political developments in the opening decades of Soviet rule in Armenia. Some of his fiery propaganda verse (e.g., his "Leniniana"), embodying the sincere hopes millions of people pinned on the October Revolution, now have only a historical value. Such poems are considerable in number, and although ideology resonates through most of his work, it contains a great many of the brightest pages of literature ever written in Armenian.

Traditionally, critics associate the origins of Soviet Armenian literature with Hakob Hakobyan and Šušanik Kurlinyan, the first to write "proletarian" literature. But the laurel for forging a new literary tradition must be given to Charents, who labored passionately to fashion an aesthetic realm for the Red Regime, for which he fought with word and weapon. It was a tortuous, somewhat erratic, and eventually fatal process. There was the pull of his national identity. It had of late, especially since the beginning of the twentieth century, given rise to visions of a homeland: the remote, misty land of Nairi that fed romantic political expectations. Charents was given to such dreams until his shocking march in 1915 in the ranks of Armenian volunteers supporting the Russian war effort against the Ottoman Empire. It inspired his long poem "Danteakan araspel" (Dantesque legend), wherein Charents leads the reader through the Armenian inferno of 1915. Death, devastation, and innocent optimism contrast sharply in the poem. A little later, in his "Vahagn" (whom some contemporary poets had invoked triumphantly), Charents buried the remains of this old god, humiliated and slain by Armenia's enemies. The symbolic end of Vahagn's myth marked the beginning of a new phase in Charents's political orientation. He soon committed himself, body and soul, to Bolshevik Armenia.

But charting his own literary course was not to be as simple a task. The great masters of Armenian literature, past and present, crowded his path. Particularly in his early years, he was under the spell of Vahan



Tērean's poetic output (e.g., "Erek' erg tḥradaluk atjkan," Three songs for a pale girl). He repudiated Tērean's art, only to repent many a time. He was then attracted to the Russian symbolists (e.g., his collection "Tziatzan," Rainbow). Seized by revolutionary fervor, he wrote two long poems in 1918, "Soma" and "Amboḥnerē ḥelagarvatz" (The frenzied masses), while fighting for Tsarytsin in the ranks of the Red Army. Both were sheer dynamite, an indictment of the old world order and a romanticized panegyric of the revolution and the power of the masses. These were followed by his "radio-poems" and the first of his three celebrated "visions" of death. The latter took shape in the autumn of 1920, during the Turkish onslaught on Armenia. In it, Charents offers himself as the ultimate sacrifice in hopes of sparing his country further suffering. There followed his "Amenapoem" (a sort of "Everyone's poem," sharing certain similarities with Mayakovsky's "150.000.000"), a reflection of the fateful events of the time, and "Charents-name," an autobiographical poem intertwined with contemporary realities to 1921.

By the early twenties, Charents had certain obvious affinities with the principles of the Russian *Lef* (Left front of art). Furthermore, Armenia had become Soviet and the matter of re-evaluating or discarding the old literature and fashioning a new one had emerged as an imperative. Although he had already introduced some innovative trends, Charents, with G. Abov and A. Vštuni, issued in June of 1922 the "Declaration of the Three," totally rejecting old Armenian literature. This brought him much closer to the Russian futurists. But as always, Charents rapidly shifted between extreme moods and remained a knotty bundle of contradictions. As an artistic expression of the new principles (class struggle, sexual instinct, iron, technology, the color red, style, movement, rhythm, speed, etc.), Charents wrote the long poem "Rōmans anser" (Loveless romance), a brilliant vulgarity. In the same nihilistic vein he worked on his novel, *Erkir Nairi*, and soon completed his "Taḥaran" (Songbook).

*Erkir Nairi* placed Charents in the thick of the most pernicious controversies and the most painful dilemmas of the day. It was meant to deliver the *coup de grâce* to an ailing romantic mentality that, as he saw it, had turned into a demoralizing malaise, epitomized by an amorphous, nonexistent fatherland, Nairi. He went all out to define and destroy the inebriating myth of Nairi as a web of associations of antiquity, legitimacy, national vainglory, parochial patriotism, indolent nostalgia, debilitating insularity, and unfulfilled rosy dreams. Ever since the annexation of the Khanate of Erivan by Russia in 1828, the issue of reviving historic Armenia had by the 1870s slowly risen to the top of the national agenda, reducing almost all other concerns into insignificant issues. An intense,



dramatic period of alternate hopes and utter disappointments had begun with the Balkan Wars, only to end with the cataclysm of 1915. And the first Republic of Armenia had survived for barely thirty months. For Charents, these setbacks spoke loudly of the ineffectiveness of Armenian mentality, identity, and, above all, leadership that he saw unfit for attaining national aspirations in this rotten, odious old world. Now that a new world was on the rise, with Armenia a part and parcel of the larger historical processes, it was time to jettison, once and for all, the old legacies that weighed down heavily on the Armenian spirit, impeding its wholesome progress.

*Erkir Nairi* is a politically charged satirical novel. Kars, a provincial city, is the setting, just before the outbreak of World War I. Though not a novel in the conventional sense, it ably captures the atmosphere in Charents's birthplace. In a rapid tempo, in short and sharp sentences, Charents describes Kars, a typical Nairian town, ramshackle and squalid with a deadly dull routine—a far cry from the romanticized vision of Nairi. In the second part of the novel, Kars and its leadership are seen during the war; in the third part, the fall of Kars and the destruction of the dream are described. The tragic backdrop to all this is the heinous crime perpetrated against the Armenians during the “imperialistic” war, with Charents plunging into unforgiving criticism of the leadership for its incompetence, naivete, and petty bourgeois romanticism. But the author looked forward to the remaining tiny stretch of Nairi, now a Soviet Socialist Republic, where the country was being built anew. This unusually dynamic experience of soul searching, sustained throughout with an invigorating honesty, was controversial. Charents's demolition work, some of his views and generalizations, and his technique (caricature, hyperbole, a sarcastically cutting style, etc.) have all been seen by some as unnecessarily extreme.

As *Erkir Nairi* appeared in installments in the periodical press, Charents completed the cycle “Tafaran” (Songbook), a collection of lyric poems. This was an abrupt return to the moods and modes of the old literature he repudiated, an imitation in many ways of Sayeat-Nōvay's style. But the series bore the imprint of Charents's artistic character and appeared at a time when a trend to banish lyric poetry was restricting the imagination of Soviet Armenian authors, who were now entirely given to the political and economic agenda of the new system. The collection concluded with a most popular poem, “Es im anuš Hayastani arevahan barn [or barn] em sirum” (“I love the sun-drenched fruit [or name] of my sweet Armenia”; there is some uncertainty as to which of the two words Charents used, but the academic edition of his works opted for *bar*). No Armenian poem treating the same theme in modern times seems to



be as popular as this poem, whose figurative and connotative epithets powerfully and memorably evoke Armenia's spirit and story. At this juncture, Charents wrote poems for Lenin and other politically motivated works (*Poezozuřna, Kapkaz řamařa, Komalmanah*), still rejecting the legacy of the past.

In late 1924 Charents left for a seven month tour of Europe (mainly Italy, Germany, and France). The West had a benevolent impact on his thought. Qualifying his literary position as vulgar and erroneous in letters from abroad, Charents noted that the great masters of the past had faithfully but creatively echoed their respective epochs, and the mentality of the ruling classes reverberated in their work. The new proletarian literature, he went on, lamentably lacked this essential quality and had become a lifeless literature in the form of pitiable *agitkas*. Having set aside "the drum of the *Lef*," he was now ready to imbibe imaginatively the art of the masters and, maintaining the highest professional and aesthetic standards, to fashion a new literature as a mirror of the socialist mentality and lifestyle. Two of the memorable poems born during the trip were "Stambol," which to the author was an "international prostitute" and stood as a symbol of bloody conquests, decadence, and anti-communism, and "Ėlegia grvatz Venetikum" (Elegy written in Venice), evaluating the political and poetic stance toward Soviet Armenia of Avetik Isahakyan (q.v.) and like-minded Armenians in the Armenian Dispersion.

In 1926, having shot and wounded a sixteen-year-old girl, Mariana Ayvazyan, Charents ended up in the Erevan House of Correction. (It has been suggested that Charents committed this violent act to draw the party's attention to his insupportable plight. Cf. A. Zak'aryan, ed., *Ėtiře Charentsi datavarutyuně*, Erevan, 1995 [*Banber Hayastani arřivneri*, 1995/1].) He published his sympathetic diaries under the title *Hiřotutyunner Yerevani utřich tnits*. He attained a high level of artistic creation with his "Hmbapet řavarřě" (Captain Shavarsh), which offers revealing psychological insight into the life of a soldier against a background of the harrowing events of the day. By now, Charents had ruefully made peace with his predecessors and had outdistanced a very talented group of young contemporaries. His only quarrel now was with a host of rigid adversaries (e.g., Nairi Zaryan, q.v., and the critics Gurgen Vanandetsi, 1898–1937, and Norayr Dabalyan, 1904–55), who similarly aspired to chart a fresh literary course. In the early twenties, especially after the appearance of his two volumes in Moscow (1922), Charents had already come under venomous attacks that denounced him as a nationalist-bourgeois-chauvinist-individualist-egotist-pornographer-reactionary, among other things. The gap grew ever wider as Charents unequivocally adhered to his losing proposition that the



national tradition was the irreplaceable premise on which a new literature with universal dimensions and international significance would rise.

In *Ēpikakan lusabats* (Epic dawn, 1930), which consisted of the poems he wrote in 1927–30, Charents evaluated his maturing art. He passed harsh judgment on his wayward experiments and paid tribute and aspired to the art of Yovhannēs Tumanian, Vahan Tērean (q.q.v.), and Pushkin—a genuine echo of their own time that was distinguished by dazzling sophistication and amazing simplicity. Charents continued his public polemic against his antagonists, who paradoxically advocated the same principle. But most of them were mere versifiers who barely touched the inner world of their contemporaries, and who shunned lyricism and sang in a bombastic version of the spoken dialect the praises of metal, tractors, vulgar physical love subordinated to instinct and ideology, communist solidarity, revolutionary figures, the Muslim East, and North Africa and the Orient as rising anti-imperialistic powers (especially in the early and the mid-twenties). Alternating between a lyrical and epic tone in this collection, Charents contemplated Armenia's immediate and revolutionary past, and the various stages of his life and accomplishments, always predicated on the contemporary history of his fellow countrymen.

His last collection, *Girk' čanaparhi* (The book of the road), was printed in 1933, but its distribution was delayed. Additions and revisions were forced before it was made available to the public in 1934, at a most unpropitious period in the history of the Soviet Union. Its content provided much ammunition for ill-wishers, rivals, and critics, who, as before, unleashed a heavy barrage of hostile criticism for his ideological failures. Broadly speaking, in this book Charents summed up his bold revisionist views on some fundamental aspects and epochs of Armenian history, thought, and letters; offered wisdom and guidance to generations yet to come; and ruminated in a lyrical vein on the meaning of life, the human soul, and the elements of abiding artistic creation.

The cycle of historical pieces in largely chronological order evaluates the principal stages in the Armenian experience. It begins with the long poem "Sasuntsi Davitš," in which Charents claims that obsequiousness and conformity accounts for the hazy and gloomy past of his country. (He made Dzenov Ōhan into a pusillanimous and cringing character and released Pokr Mher from his captivity to destroy the forces of evil, an unmistakable reference to the advent of communism.) His attack on the Armenian ruling classes is particularly virulent in the next poem, "Patmut'yan k'arutinerov" (Along the crossroads of history). Charents heaped all the blame on them for the misery of his people. In "Depi lyarē Masis" (Heading for Mount Masis), Charents imaginatively



recreated H. Abovean's last night before his disappearance. Abovean is seen reviewing his papers and life, dismissing renewed doubts—doubts that have been gnawing at his heart for a long time now—and questioning his political orientation. In thinly veiled critical allegory, "Mahvan tesil" (Vision of death) assesses the views of writers, intellectuals, and other figures (e.g., Ł. Ališan, P. Durean, R. Patkanean, Raffi, D. Varužan, q.q.v., and others) who shaped Armenian mentality in the second half of the nineteenth century and the early part of the twentieth. The break with the sad, uninspiring past, both distant and immediate, and adherence to the new revolutionary era and the Soviet regime occurs in "Zrahapat 'Vardan Zoravar'" (The armored car 'General Vardan'), thus completing Charents's sweeping review of the Armenian experience.

The second cycle ("Taġer ev ġorġurdner") is made up of poems for the travelers, the sick, the illuminators of manuscripts, the dead, masons and architects; it counsels future generations, city builders, tillers, and song makers. This is followed by "Arvest k'ertut'yan" (The art of poetry) and "Girk' imatsut'yan" (Book of the intellect), made up of *rubaiyat*, distichs, and other poems, and which includes the famous "Patgam" (message) that alerts the Armenians that their only salvation lies in their unity (literally, "collective power"). A wide range of topics is covered under these subtitles, including words of wisdom, philosophical contemplation, literature as art, polemical lines, politics, history, cultural topics, and self-evaluation. Some critics have suggested that Charents was aware that this would be his last book (based on his line "Du ġites, or k'o matyann ays verjin. . . ." "You know, that this last book of yours. . . ." However, the Armenian for "last" could also mean "latest"). There is clearly a pervasive sense of urgency and anxiety and a good many parting words to lend support to this suggestion. Charents, who sang the new as the old crumbled around him, now saw the new degenerate into cruel totalitarianism. That he was disillusioned with the central leadership and apparatus (Beria had already embarked on his monstrous mission) is beyond doubt, but whether or not he was disillusioned with the lofty ideals of the new political philosophy cannot be said with certainty.

The book is among the very best collections and is unrivaled in many respects. Not only does it distill the contributions (new patterns of meter and rhyme, rhythm and cadence, and genre and diction) of a genius who had just begun to mature, it is the brightest reflection of the latest, albeit thorny, phase of the Armenian experience. Here, as elsewhere in his work, Charents unveiled new aspects to the Armenian soul and audaciously explored fresh grounds for a new literature and identity with cruel but salutary honesty. There is some noise and rhetoric in some of his works,



but such flaws are far outweighed by the better part of his oeuvre, which remains one of the best responses yet to calls made by Vahan Terean and other contemporaries to elevate Armenian literature to a higher plane of universal significance.

**AKSEL BAKUNTS**'s (1899–1937) life was cut short at the terribly young age of thirty-eight. The usual array of ideological charges were brought against him, including chauvinism, idealization of the past, rejection and alienation from socialist society, and so on. Such attacks were unleashed early in his career and intensified immediately after the appearance of his first collection of short stories, *Mtnadzor*. The eighteen pieces included here set the tone, scope, artistic principles, and interests of the author. The majestically mountainous region of Zangezur was one of the principal settings, and life in this remote, primitive rural area came under his artistic scrutiny. Out of the drama and anguish of the individual, whether inflicted by the harsh rules of fellow individuals, religion, custom and tradition, political upheavals, or nature, sad stories come to light of suffering that speak of the brutal truth in a context free from feelings of pity or maudlin sentimentalism. This proved to be a bitter pill to swallow. It was obvious that Bakunts, despite treating the topic in his own way, was not going to proclaim loudly and falsely the advent of a new lifestyle. The latter had as yet had no effect on the countryside, and Bakunts was not prepared to swallow the blanket ideological prescriptions hook, line, and sinker. Nor was he prepared to give up his uplifting aesthetic principles, the in-depth exploration of the human soul, or his literary creed and freedom.

The stories dealing with the Soviet period far outnumber those focused on the pre-revolutionary era. In the opening decades of the new regime, no changes were visible in the remote parts of the Armenian countryside (in Bakunts's "Mrots," for instance, some families are still celebrating the pagan Armenian New Year, *Nawasard*). This was Bakunts's domain. With keen eyes, he looked deep into the inner world of the Armenian peasant and into the complex relationships with his fellow human beings and nature. His aim, emanating from his literary creed, was to capture the essence of all this—a task which in his better stories he accomplished brilliantly.

A tragic picture of the Armenian peasantry emerges from Bakunts's artistic accounts. "Alpiakan manušak" (Alpine violet) brings together some of the finer aspects of Aksel's craftsmanship and literary-aesthetic principles. It has a simple plot. An archaeologist and a painter visit a remote village, where they encounter a beautiful woman whose picture the



in the late 1980s, Hanzadyan called in this novel for self-reliance and alliance with Bolshevik Russia. Some lurid scenes, verbosity, haste, and infelicities mar this novel. Such shortcomings are found in many of his extensive works, but Hanzadyan was an experienced craftsman who wrote with verve and imagination.

**HOVHANNES ŠIRAZ**'s (1915–84) first collection of verse was met with wide and warm acclaim. Amid rhymed euphoria for steel, tractors, industrial technology and the like, he delighted his readers with his lyrical microcosm, ablaze with dazzling colors of nature. This was shortly followed by *Siamanto ev Hjezare* (also *Hačezare*, or *Hčezare*), perhaps his most popular narrative poem, which has an Armenian shepherd and a half-Armenian, half-Kurdish girl as the central characters of a tragic love story. In more ways than one, it established his style and foreshadowed some of the themes that would fascinate him most: love, human destiny, nature, and patriotism. Širaz's first book unfolds for the reader the natural beauty of his native region, Širak, in Eastern Armenia, and his poem has as its backdrop the area around Lake Van in the historical Armenian province of Vaspurakan in Western Armenia. In the context of Armeno-Kurdish relations, land and landmarks, oppressive traditions and history, religious and social injustices are all fused into one with Siamanto's suffering and unhappy fate, in a powerfully emotional and highly romantic style adorned with an endless string of fresh, vivid metaphors and imagery. The topographical and geographical designations that emerge as appealing symbols still in captivity under Ottoman rule would have an even greater presence in his verse composed after the fifties.

Many threads in Širaz's art intimately linked him with folklore, popular mentality and expression, Avetik Isahakyan, Sayeat Nōvay (q.q.v.), and the minstrelsy. But Širaz, like most of his predecessors, had his own distinct literary personality. He once said that he felt the tumult of the "white element of Niagara" in his chest and that the colors of the rainbow made up the strings of his lyre. Indeed, passion and emotional lyricism are the two salient features of his verse through which he sought to unravel the secrets of eternity, human character, fate, virtues, and the aesthetically beautiful. For Širaz, man was the master of his own destiny; although still imperfect, he held the potential and promise of becoming perfect ("Bibliakan," A biblical poem). Made up of divine and "satanic" elements, human beings could elevate themselves to impeccable standards by renouncing their devilish ways ("Bnutyan gluḡgortzotsě," Nature's masterpiece). Moral rectitude and unalloyed love were essential; for vain ambitions would lead to corruption and hinder human happiness



("Siraname," a love story, originally published as *Rustavtsi Šotan ev Tamarē*, Shota of Rustavi and Queen Tamar). Perhaps no other Armenian author has so reverently worshipped mothers and motherhood (*Hušardzan mayrikis*, A monument to my mother, and many other poems). But, to put it mildly, Širaz had a rather poor and traditional view of women; he distinguished only between mothers (always saintly) and other women (frequently satanic). In terms of style, Širaz's love poetry has a number of affinities with Middle Eastern literary traditions and his confrères, old and new. Eyes, eyebrows, cheeks, and lips are common in his imagery. Redeeming features of his work include the frequent flash of his sterling talent, demonstrated by sudden fresh epithets and images, and sincere sentiments bursting with emotion.

Patriotism accounted for much of Širaz's immense popularity. It nettled the establishment, but the establishment never grasped the nettle. Many criticized Širaz for repetition, worn-out platitudes, and narrow-minded nationalism. But Širaz continued unperturbed, and his entourage of young admirers recited his censored patriotic poems at literary events and public gatherings. He furiously rejected taboos and restrictions placed on political topics, toponyms, and symbols that covered up historical facts and expunged associations in compliance with Soviet central policy. Širaz invoked many an old Armenian figure, event, and toponym to highlight his numerous concerns. Held in the highest esteem is Mesrop Maštots, the genius who invented the Armenian script, ("Hayots hraškē: Mesrop Maštots," The marvel of Armenia: Mesrop Maštots), an indestructible shield for the mother tongue and national identity. The most frequently cited symbol in all of his poetry is Mount Ararat. It epitomizes Armenia and Armenian suffering and aspirations, especially the consequences of the 1915 genocide: almost total annihilation, loss of a unique culture and land (including cities such as Ani and Van), and an implicit determination never to recognize the new political borders. Numerous poems, short and long, have been inspired by each of these and similar topics; for instance, the genocide is commemorated in short works and a long poem, *Hayots danteakanē* (The Dantesque inferno of the Armenians). The heroes of the Armenian liberation movement (e.g., General Andranik Ōzanean, 1865–1927), the worldwide dispersion of the Armenians, their future and their ties to the homeland, unity of the Armenian people, prosperity of Armenia, and visions of a bright future are also a part of his patriotic verse. The opinion, whether motivated by ideology or artistic refinement, that Širaz was becoming repetitive was undoubtedly valid. It was reinforced by Širaz's own disinclination to experiment with new forms of expression. He felt that good poetry was that which touched the reader's heart. And



many of his vibrant, impassioned poems of love and his concern for peace and the destiny of his people struck a responsive chord in his readership.

**HAMO SAHYAN** (1914–93) wrote traditional poetry but in a voice all his own. From an initially rhetorical style, he refined his verse into a delicately fashioned world of warm sentiments, fine impressions, deep colors, scents, and sounds, all infused with a gentle sense of nostalgia and drama. With a fascination for nature up hill and down dale in his native region of Zangezur, Sahyan refracted through his soul nature's awesome forms and formations, seasons and elements, trees and twigs, breeze and brooks, to reveal his own state of mind and unrequited, elusive moods. His communion with his birthplace was such that he at times felt he was nature incarnate. With his native landscape as nearly the only *mise en scène* for his verse, Sahyan did indeed court monotony, and dangerously so. But more often than not, especially in his mature years, his eloquent and subtle imagery, resembling a fine embroidery, along with his unalloyed sentiments and dignified simplicity endowed many of his poems with charm.

Sahyan himself once stated in one of his poems that he was neither Sayeat-Nōvay nor Nahapet K'uchak; unlike those deep seas he was just a simple lake. Neither passion nor passionate love are found in his poetry. Instead, loneliness and an intoxicating, languorous longing for his vanished youth and an unsettling ambiguity permeate his lyrical verse, in addition to a subtle tension and a sense of unfulfillment. Although fully aware of his colleagues' experiments, he showed no interest in innovative trends. He remained faithful to traditional patterns and wrote in a tidy, unadorned, and unobtrusive style. This and his austere, intensely personal sentiments distinguished him from other traditionalist writers. The fresh angles he discovered as he contemplated the inseparable affinities human beings shared with nature distinguished him from all other Soviet Armenian poets.

**SILVA KAPUTIKYAN** (1919–) made her literary debut on the eve of World War II, but published her first major collection in 1945. Included in it is "Hosk' im ordun" (A word to my son), which is still her most popular poem. An exhortation for her son not to forget his mother tongue, the poem concerns one of her two major themes, national identity. (Her other favorite theme is lyric poetry.) National identity is symbolized in the poem by Mount Ararat, the capital Erevan, the Armenian language, and figures and events of the past and present and inspire her devotion to her homeland. Her nationalism is enveloped in the larger context of Soviet patriotism, which brought her All-Union popularity and laurels (such



as the USSR State Prize for Literature in 1952). The unhappy course of her people's history left a profound mark on her poetry, as did the revival of Armenia as a Soviet republic and, particularly, the protection the USSR afforded Armenia. Her patriotism is free from chauvinism and extremism, and her poetry places much emphasis on peace and prosperity. In poems commemorating the genocide (e.g., *Mtorunner čanaparhi kesin*, Reflections at the halfway point), despite her unallayed wrath, she found the survival of her nation, the rebuilding of Armenia, and its rosy future to be the most eloquent and most promising response to the attempt to destroy her people.

Although Kaputikyan's first collection was met with adverse criticism by some, she was soon recognized as one of the gifted poets of her generation and as the leading poetess of Armenia. Her preeminence owed much to her candid lyric verse. Youthful sentimentalism disappeared fast, and her love poetry blossomed into tender yet proud sentiments and sensibilities. Hers was an unrequited emotional affection. Hence her disappointments, handled delicately and ingenuously; hence also her charming sense of anticipation and poignant longing, all of which add a light touch of drama to her verse, making it vibrate with life and lofty feelings of love.

Kaputikyan wrote two well-known travel books. The first, *K'aravan-nerē deṛ kaylum en* (The caravans are still on the move) is a description of her visit to Middle Eastern Armenian communities. The second, *Hčankar hogu ev kartezi guynerits* (A mosaic composed of the colors of the soul and the map), is an account of her visit to North American Armenian communities. While the former is a highly emotional encounter with the descendants of the survivors of the genocide of 1915, the latter is a sober scrutiny of the Armenians of the United States and Canada. Both have historical value as records of the Armenian realities in two very different regions seen through the keen, if biased, eyes of a Soviet Armenian observer. Both are eloquent testimonies to Kaputikyan's excellent prose, written with verve in an attractive Eastern Armenian.

**GEVORG ĒMIN** (1919–1998) was inclined from the outset to avoid the trodden path of poetry. But like so many of his generation, Ēmin was subjected to fierce attacks for wayward ideological and artistic failures. There was amid all this senseless criticism some validity to the observation that Emin's style was somewhat careless and his love poetry rhetorical. The blend of sentiment and intellect he sought remained elusive. In the mid-fifties as the Stalinist rigidities loosened somewhat, Ēmin and his colleagues spoke loudly of the need for exploring the complexities of